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# HITCHCOCK'S

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE



WANTED

ALFRED HITCHCOCK


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Dear Readers:

According to the meteorologists we are due, this season, for one of the hottest summers ever. This is certain to trigger trips to the country for weekends, or to the shore for brief breathers. Hence, I feel I must add a word of caution before you pack the car. Do, please, take care the breather isn't curtailed by some misadventure similar to the one experienced by the vacationers in *THE FAMILY AFFAIR*, by Richard Hardwick, appearing in this issue. These unsuspecting souls, about to enjoy the flora and fauna in a rest area, fell heir to a living nightmare in broad daylight.

If that isn't enough to dampen your enthusiasm for travel, you can vacation by bus and perhaps participate in some horripilant hill-billy hijinks, as does the protagonist in the *BUS TO CHATTANOOGA*, written for your entertainment by Jonathan Craig.

I also want to add a word of warning to trusting camp counselors who think little "T" shirts house innocent hearts of gold. They should take counsel from Donald Honig's *JOURNEY WITH A MURDERER*.

For stay-at-homes there is a wealth of air-conditioned homicide and breezy, but intriguing, machinations less violent, in this issue, authorized by your favorites.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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*As Aesop so aptly said, "Little by little does the trick". However, one must anticipate when that slow progression has attained the ultimate.*

**T**HIRTY miles beyond Roanoke, just past Christiansburg, Lucky Tompkins spotted a car pulled off the road. Slowing, he noted as he drifted past that it was empty. Probably hunters, he thought, as there was a stretch of woods either side of the highway along here. Parking around the next curve, where his

lieved than grieved to learn that both Gerry Cousins and Joe Mack were dead. Now they wouldn't be able to talk.

A hundred miles farther on he learned from another newscast that the bank guard had also died. That tore it, he thought. If they caught him now, he faced a murder rap.

Tompkins made it nearly to Knoxville, two hundred and fifty miles from Roanoke, before a third

# Escape

car couldn't be seen from the other, he walked back. No one was in sight.

The two-year-old car was unlocked, but no key was in the ignition. This was no problem to an accomplished car thief. Tompkins snapped into place the ignition bridge he carried in his pocket almost as quickly as he could have inserted a key. There was still no one in sight when he pulled away.

A report of the attempted bank robbery came over the car radio ten minutes later. He was more re-



By  
RICHARD  
DENING

bulletin told him he was going to have to switch cars again.

The newscaster said: "West Virginia state police and the FBI report two new leads in the unsuccessful bank robbery attempt in Roanoke at ten this morning. As was reported in earlier newscasts, two of the three bandits were shot down by bank guard Henry Todd, who was in the vault room out of sight of the bandits when he heard one of the trio announce that it was a holdup. The two bandits died instantly from Todd's fire. The bank guard was critically wounded by the return fire of the third, who escaped without loot. Henry Todd died in the hospital about an hour later.

"The dead bandits have now been identified as Gerald Cousins, thirty-two, and Joseph Mack, forty-five, both ex-convicts, and both wanted for armed robbery in New York State. From eyewitness descriptions the third bandit, still at large, is believed to be William (Lucky) Tompkins, thirty-eight, also an ex-convict, and also wanted for armed robbery plus car theft in New York State. Tompkins is described as five feet ten, one hundred and sixty pounds, brown hair, brown eyes and a medium complexion. He has regular features and a rounded face with no distinguishing marks. When last seen he

was wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt and dark blue necktie, and a dark gray snap-brim hat. He is armed and should be considered extremely dangerous.

"An abandoned automobile believed to have been the escape car was found near Christiansburg about noon. Police and the FBI theorize that the fleeing bandit had another car waiting there to which he switched, and is traveling southwest on U.S. Route 11."

What trash, Tompkins thought. The fuzz knew it had been an emergency dump, because the hunters must have reported their car missing by now. They probably had the description and license number of the car he was driving broadcast for five hundred miles in all directions from Roanoke. It pained him a little that they thought he would be dumb enough to tumble for a planted announcement.

At the same time, he felt a touch of smug satisfaction that his strategy had worked. Obviously they didn't really think he was heading southwest on Route 11, or they would never have released that information. They assumed he had headed either north or south from Christiansburg on some secondary road, and hoped to throw him off guard by making him think they were searching in another direction.

He had stuck to the main road and the fastest route deliberately, knowing the cops and the FBI would automatically assume he would take evasive action. They did credit him with a little brains, but not enough. Figuring no old pro would be stupid enough to run in a straight line, they hadn't even bothered to consider the main highway. Which was exactly what he had guessed their reasoning would be.

Nevertheless, a routine bulletin would have gone in this direction, even though they wouldn't suspect he was anywhere near Route 11. It would be too dangerous to drive through Knoxville in broad daylight.

Ten miles short of Knoxville he found a dirt road off to the right which looked promising. It proved to be even better than he could reasonably have expected. There were farms on both sides of the road, but about a quarter mile from the highway the road passed through a heavily wooded and underbrushed area which concealed it from the nearby farmhouses.

Parking the car, he got out to study the situation. He located a spot between two trees on the right side of the road where he would be able to nose the car into the underbrush by crossing a shallow ditch. He worked his way into the

growth on foot to plan exactly where he wanted to drive. Minutes later the car was deep in the underbrush, fifty feet from the dirt road.

When he had straightened a few bushes at the entry point and had used a broken branch to brush away the tire marks, he surveyed the result with satisfaction. There was some crushed foliage, but he didn't think it was obvious enough to incite any passing motorist to investigate. There couldn't be much traffic here, and there were so many potholes, drivers were likely to keep their gaze firmly fixed on the road instead of examining the roadside scenery. If the car weren't discovered by some hunter poking through the underbrush, it might never be found. That would end his trail over two hundred miles back.

Glancing at his watch, he saw it was only four P.M. Working his way back to the car, he sat in it and ran the battery down by listening to the radio until dark. The periodic news bulletins reported nothing new in the search for him.

As it was the middle of July and daylight saving time was in effect, it didn't start to get dark until nine P.M. He left the car at dusk, and by the time he had walked the quarter mile to the highway, it was fully dark.

Tompkins walked along the edge of the highway toward Knoxville, fading back into the darkness alongside the road each time headlights appeared from either direction. Probably this was an unnecessary precaution, as there were farms along here, and there would be nothing unusual about a man walking from one farm to another; but he didn't care to risk being spotted by some cruising patrol car and having some curious cop stop to make a routine check.

About a mile beyond the dirt road he saw the lights of a tourist court on the opposite side of the highway. There was a filling station and an all-night coffee shop in conjunction with the tourist court. His stomach constricted at sight of the coffee shop, for he hadn't eaten since eight that morning, but he couldn't risk showing his face when he planned to steal a car. He drifted into the corn field on his side of the road and walked between the rows hidden from view, until he was at the far end of the court, beyond the glow of lights from the filling station, cafe and motel office. Then he quickly crossed the highway and faded into the shadow of a tree.

There was a new car in front of the last cabin. There was a light in the cabin, but the draperies were

drawn. Tompkins decided he couldn't risk taking the car until the light had been off long enough to make it reasonably certain the occupants were asleep, but there was no reason he couldn't quietly prepare things so that the car would be ready to go when the time came.

There was a car, with its parking lights burning, in front of the motel office about fifty yards away, but no one was in it, and no one was in sight. Silently he moved over to the new car.

The car was locked, but Tompkins had no trouble opening it with the picklock he carried. Slipping into the front seat, he pulled the door closed only far enough to shut off the dome light. From one pocket he produced the wire ignition bridge, from another a pencil flashlight. A moment later the bridge was fixed in place.

A man in shirtsleeves, and another wearing a suit, suddenly appeared from the motel office and moved his way. It was the proprietor showing a prospective tenant a cabin, he instantly guessed. The two men couldn't avoid seeing him if he attempted to slip from the car, for opening the door would automatically turn on the dome light. Tompkins simply dropped flat on the seat.

He heard footsteps approach



the next cabin, then stop. There was the sound of a door opening, then a sudden glow of light as a lamp was switched on and the door was left open. Tompkins risked a peek and saw the shirt-sleeved man standing in the doorway, half turned toward him, but looking into the cabin. The other man presumably was inside examining the accommodations.

Tompkins lowered himself onto the seat again and stayed there until he heard the cabin door shut and twin sets of footsteps recede in the direction of the office.

Cautiously coming erect, he looked after the men, deciding to wait until they re-entered the office before venturing to leave the car. Just as they entered it, the door of the cabin immediately in front of him opened and a man carrying a suitcase stepped out.

"Lucky" Tompkins, he thought bitterly, dropping prone again. He had to pick the car of a night driver who probably had been sleeping all day. There was no way to avoid discovery. He snaked the gun from beneath his arm and waited.

He heard the man round the car, open the trunk, heave in his suitcase and slam the trunk door. When the man approached the driver's side, Tompkins didn't wait for him to discover the un-

latched door. Coming erect, he shoved it open with his foot and leveled the gun.

"If you yell, you're dead," he said quietly. "Get in and pull the door closed."

The man blinked. He was about Tompkins' size and build and of approximately the same age, perhaps a year or two older. He had a smooth, round face similar to Tompkins', except his complexion was darker. He wore a conservative gray suit, a dark gray hat, and he held the car keys in his right hand.

Aside from that one blink, the man showed neither surprise nor alarm. His expression was merely resigned. Tompkins got the curious impression that he had expected something such as this to happen.

Seeing that there was going to be no resistance, Tompkins slid over to allow room behind the wheel. When the man was seated and had closed the door, Tompkins said, "The ignition is bridged, so you won't need those keys. Hand 'em over."

The man dropped the keys into his outstretched palm. After pocketing them, Tompkins transferred the gun to his left hand and reached out his right to pat beneath the man's arms. He was surprised to find a gun under the

left one. Removing it, he glanced down long enough to identify it as a thirty-eight Detective Special, then thrust it into a side pocket. He wondered if he had struck more bad luck by running into a cop.

There was no time to ask questions now. In a few moments the new tenant of the next-door cabin would have finished registering and would be driving his car that way.

"Start the car," Tompkins ordered.

When the engine was going, the man gave him an inquiring look.

"Pull out and turn left," Tompkins said.

The new tenant of the next-door cabin emerged from the motel office and climbed into the car with dimmers burning as the car backed. Then they were pulling out of the driveway onto the highway and heading back in the direction from which Tompkins had come.

The driver spoke for the first time. "How'd you find me?" he asked in a husky voice.

Tompkins considered this question from all angles before deciding to ignore it. The question suggested that the man didn't realize this was a chance encounter, but thought Tompkins knew who he was. His first impulse was to ask

the man what he was talking about. Then he decided he might learn more quickly if he let him continue to labor under his misapprehension.

"There's a dirt road off to the left up ahead," Tompkins said. "Start slowing down to watch for it in about a half mile."

The driver glanced at the mileage gauge and began to slow exactly five-tenths of a mile later.

"There it is," Tompkins pointed. "Swing left."

The driver signaled, waited for approaching headlights to pass, and swung into the road. They bumped along as far as the wooded section, where Tompkins ordered the driver to park and cut his engine and lights. Tompkins switched on his pencil flashlight as the car lights blinked out. Reaching behind him to open the car door, without taking his eyes from the driver, he backed out. Then he ordered the other man to slide across the seat and come out the same way.

When the man had complied, Tompkins said, "Lean against the front fender with both hands."

Stoically the man assumed the indicated position. After a quick shakedown which turned up no other weapons, Tompkins lifted a wallet from the man's hip pocket. Examining it by the pencil flash-

light, he found it stuffed with currency. There wasn't a paper of any kind in it, though.

"You don't carry much identification, do you?" Tompkins said.

The man glanced over his shoulder at him. "Can I straighten up?"

"Go ahead," Tompkins dropped the wallet into a pocket.

Straightening, and slowly turning to face Tompkins, the man said, "Can we make a deal?"

"Like what?"

"If you go back and report to Duty that you made the hit, naturally you're going to have to come up with the money, because that's what he really sent you for. Duty wouldn't care whether I was alive or dead, so long as I never turn up again. If you tell him you never found me, you could keep the money."

The name Duty had a vaguely familiar ring, but Tompkins couldn't quite place where he had heard it. The mention of money roused his curiosity more than the odd name anyway.

He said, "Where's the money?"

Ignoring the question, the man said in an earnest voice, "If you hit me, my body is bound to be found and identified, so you couldn't afford not to turn in the money. Duty would know you found me the minute he read in

the papers that I'd turned up dead. But if you let me go, I promise I'll disappear forever. I've got arrangements all made to get a fake passport and fake identification in New Orleans. My flight to Rio is already booked under the fake name. All you would have to leave me is about three grand for expenses, and you could pocket the rest. Gugino would never know you found me."

A slight shock wave traveled along Tompkins' spine. No wonder the name Duty had a familiar ring. Salvatore (Duty) Gugino was currently in national headlines as one of the Cosa Nostra council members under investigation by the United States Senate.

At the same instant Tompkins realized who he had netted. Luigi (Louie) Camelli, a lieutenant of Gugino's, had triggered the investigation by squealing secrets to the senate investigators, then had a change of mind, and had fled the protection of the federal bodyguards assigned to keep him alive until he could complete his testimony. The circumstances of his disappearance had been such to make it apparent it had been voluntary and the Cosa Nostra hadn't gotten to him, and for some days the papers had been speculating as to who would catch up with him first—Federal Agents, or

the Cosa Nostra. Somebody would.

Apparently Camelli had financed his flight with money belonging to his former boss.

To test his guess, Tompkins asked, "Why should I leave you three grand, Louie? Why shouldn't I take it all?"

"You want me out of the country, don't you?" the man asked, showing no surprise at the name. "If you just strand me broke, you might as well burn me, because I'd never make it to Rio, and eventually either the Feds or Duty will catch up with me. There'd be no point in not telling that you heisted me, and that would cook you good. Three grand is your insurance."

Tompkins made no immediate reply, because he was thinking. If Louie Camelli actually did have arrangements made to get out of the country under a fake name, perhaps Tompkins could take over the arrangements. With a murder rap hanging over him and the FBI after him for bank robbery, no place in the United States would ever be safe for him again. It looked as though he had run into another bit of the amazing luck which had given him his nickname.

He said, "How do I know you can make it to Rio, even if I leave you three grand? As you just ad-

mitted, you'll squeal your head off if you don't make it."

"It's all arranged. Honest. I can't miss."

"Convince me," Tompkins said. "Just exactly what are the arrangements?"

"My cousin Tony set it up," Camelli said. "You must know Tony Ricotta."

Tompkins had never before heard the name, but he nodded.

"Tony has the contact in New Orleans. It'll cost me fifteen hundred for a complete set of papers, including a passport. If you leave me three grand, I'll have plane fare, plus a little left over, until I can get established down in Rio. Tony arranged it all by phone, and the guy in New Orleans is expecting me."

"He know who you are?"

Camelli shook his head. "He won't know when he sees me, either, because I never been in New Orleans. And Tony sure ain't going to tell anybody, because it would be his head if Duty ever found out he gave me a lift. There's no possibility of a cross."

"Who is this New Orleans contact?"

"Arnie something or other. It's on a piece of paper in my pocket."

"Get it out," Tompkins ordered.

Luigi Camelli reached into a side pocket of his suit coat, and

drew out a slip of paper. Tompkins examined it by the pencil flashlight. On it was printed in pencil, "Arnie DuBois", and a French Quarter address. Below that was printed, "All is fair."

"What's this 'All is fair' stuff?" Tompkins asked.

"That's the password, so he'll know I'm the guy he's expecting. He doesn't know what I look like."

It seemed almost too good to be true. Luigi Camelli had handed him an escape route on a silver platter.

"When's he expecting you?" Tompkins asked.

"Tomorrow night. That's why I was driving on tonight after only a couple of hours sleep. It's still over six hundred miles."

There was only one other matter of importance to learn. Tompkins said, "A lot could happen in six hundred miles. With no identification in your wallet, what do you show a cop if you get stopped for speeding?"

"I've got brains enough not to pull any traffic violations," Camelli said.

"Yeah? How about this heap? Is there a want out on it?"

Camelli shook his head. "I took a bus from New York to Baltimore and bought it for cash there. It's registered in a fake name, of

course, but nobody's looking for it."

Ordering Camelli to stand back, Tompkins walked around to the rear of the car and focused his light on the license plate. It was a Maryland plate.

Returning to within three feet of the other man, Tompkins said, "Okay, Louie, you've sold me. Now where's the money?"

"You'll let me keep three grand?"

"Would I want you loused up so Duty would find out I've got the rest?"

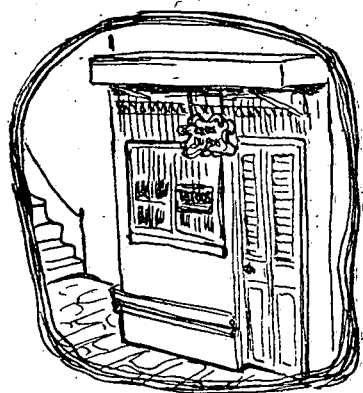
Camelli breathed a sigh of relief. "In the suitcase in the trunk."

"I guess that covers everything," Tompkins said, and shot the man in the stomach three times.

Tompkins had noted that afternoon that the nearest farmhouse was a good five hundred yards away. Even if the shots aroused curiosity, it would be some minutes before anyone could get there. Unhurriedly he dragged the body several yards into the underbrush. Returning to the car, he backed halfway to the main highway before he found a place wide enough to turn around. There was no indication that anyone was coming to investigate the shots when he pulled back on Route 11 and headed toward Knoxville.

In Knoxville he stopped at an all-night restaurant for his first meal since that morning. It was midnight when he drove on. He kept well within the speed limit, not caring to chance blowing his golden opportunity through something as petty as a traffic ticket.

Lucky suppressed his curiosity about the amount of money in the suitcase, deciding to wait until he could safely examine the contents



in some motel. And he wanted to make a lot more distance before checking into a motel.

He reached Birmingham at five in the morning. By then he had been up twenty-two hours, had driven more than five hundred miles and, in addition, had been subjected to the emotional strain of attempting a bank robbery and committing two murders. He was both physically and mentally exhausted. It was still three hundred

and seventy miles to New Orleans, but he had until that evening to get there. He checked into a motel and left a call for nine A.M.

Exhausted as he was, he had to check the contents of the suitcase before falling into bed. In addition to some clothing which looked as though it might fit him, there were ten stacks of banded currency. They were all hundred-dollar bills and there were a hundred bills in each stack.

In addition, Luigi Camelli's wallet held twenty-two hundred dollars. Lucky Tompkins went to sleep with a smile on his face.

He had eaten breakfast and was on the road again by ten A.M. Because he held down his speed, and also took a half-hour break for lunch, it was past six P.M. when he reached New Orleans. He had a leisurely dinner, then drove to the French Quarter address, arriving shortly before eight P.M.

The place was in a basement and had a sign on its window reading, *TATTOOS IN THREE COLORS—\$1.25 UP*. A bell jangled when he opened the door. He went in.

It was a cubbyhole of a place, furnished with nothing but a workbench containing tattooing equipment, and two low stools.

Around the walls were posters showing designs, ranging from a heart with an arrow through it to an elaborate drawing of a naked woman entwined by a snake, presumably examples of the skin artistry available.

There was no one in the place, but after a moment some draperies across a rear door opened and a small, slightly-built man with thin features and gray-flecked dark hair emerged.

"Yes, sir?" he inquired.

"I'm looking for Arnie DuBois," Tompkins said.

"You've found him."

Tompkins glanced at the draperies. "Anybody back there?"

The small man shook his head.

"All is fair," Tompkins said.

Arnie DuBois smiled. "You're right on time. Just follow me."

Pushing aside the curtains, he led the way into the living quarters behind the tattoo shop. Tompkins found himself in a small combination livingroom and bedroom. An open door beyond it led to a kitchenette.

DuBois opened a closet door and began to pull out paraphernalia. Unfurling a large white cloth, one end of which was tacked to a thin wooden rod, he draped it against the wall by fitting the ends of the rod into a pair of wall hooks. In the center of the

room he set up a camera and floodlight.

"What's this for?" Tompkins asked.

"Passport photo. Take off your hat and stand in front of the cloth."

Tompkins did as directed.

When the picture had been taken, the little man put away all the equipment before opening a desk drawer and taking out a number of forms. Laying them on the desk, he gestured for Tompkins to sit.

"Passport application forms and a driver's license application form," he explained. "I find it easier to get all the necessary information by using the official forms. Your plane reservation is in the name of George W. Harris, so use that. Pick any address in any town, so long as it's in Louisiana. I only turn out Louisiana drivers' licenses. If you want to pick New Orleans, I'll fill in a street address."

Tompkins spent twenty minutes filling out the forms, answering all questions pertaining to description truthfully. He listed New Orleans as his city of residence, leaving the street address blank. After examining the completed forms, the little man emitted a satisfied grunt.

"Come in at noon tomorrow for

the passport and you'll be all ready to go by twelve-thirty. Your plane leaves at six P.M. and you have to pick up the ticket by four-thirty. That'll be half in advance now, the other seven-fifty when you pick up your passport and driver's license."

Tompkins counted out seven hundred and fifty dollars and left. He checked into a hotel, went to bed and slept for twelve hours.

At noon the next day he returned to the tattoo shop. Arnie DuBois gave him the passport and accepted the second seven hundred and fifty dollars. By twenty after twelve Tompkins walked out of the place again with a Louisiana driver's license in his wallet, a passport in his inside breast pocket, and a slip of paper giving his flight number in his coat pocket.

He was unlocking the car when a figure closed in from either side. A gun muzzle jammed into his left side, and simultaneously the man on his right snaked a hand beneath his arm and plucked out his gun. Dropping it into a coat pocket, the man flashed an open wallet to disclose a badge.

Tompkins stared from one man to the other. Both were swarthy, bull-necked men of about forty, similar enough in appearance to be brothers.

"What is this?" he asked them.

The man who had relieved him of his gun took the keys from his hand, walked behind the car and opened the trunk. The other produced handcuffs, ordered Tompkins to hold out his wrists and snapped them into place with one hand, while keeping him covered with the other. Then he put his gun away, took Tompkins' arm and led him to a plain black sedan. Several curious pedestrians had stopped to watch the arrest, but neither of the men paid any attention to them.

With neither man now holding a gun in his hand, Tompkins wished he still had the gun in his pocket he had taken from Luigi Camelli, but unfortunately he had packed it in the suitcase.

Tompkins' captor opened the rear door of the sedan and shoved him in, then slid in next to him. The other man carried the suitcase from the trunk of Tompkins' car and heaved it on the floor in back. Climbing under the wheel, he started the engine and drove away.

"What am I being arrested for?" Tompkins asked.

Ignoring him, the man next to him snapped open the suitcase, looked a little surprised when he saw the gun lying on top, then pushed it aside and probed until



he found the money. After counting the stacks, he dropped it back in and closed the suitcase. Reaching into Tompkins' breast pocket, he drew out the passport and pocketed it.

"Lean forward so I can get at your hip pocket," he commanded.

Tompkins leaned forward. He felt the wallet slide from his hip pocket. The man removed the driver's license, dropped it into the same pocket where he had put the passport, riffled through the money and put the wallet into another pocket. Producing his gun and a small key at the same time, he unlocked the cuffs and pocketed them also, keeping Tompkins covered as he did.

"What's this all about?" Tompkins asked querulously.

"We wouldn't want to louse up Arnie by having some of his art found on you," the man said. "Not after he kindly tipped us off."

The car turned into an alley. Tompkins felt a chill move along his spine.

"You aren't cops," he blurted.

"You catch," his seatmate said.

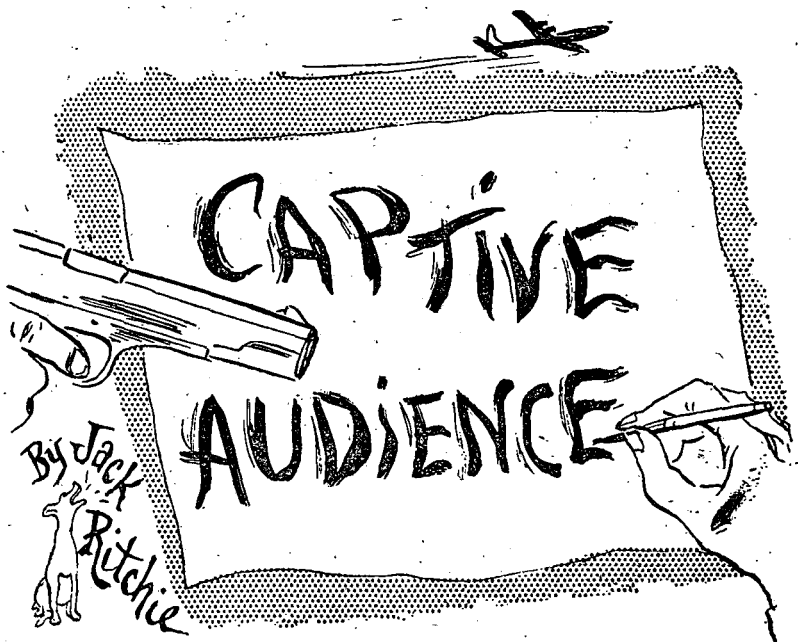
"Arnie always phones Big Nick Palermo, the boss in New Orleans, when he gets a new customer. Nick wouldn't let him operate otherwise. When Nick learned one of Duty Gugino's boys had steered the customer to Arnie, he phoned Duty long-distance to check. They're kind of distant cousins, you know. Almost everybody in Cosa Nostra is related some way. Just like Tony Ricotta is your cousin. I guess Duty squeezed Tony a little and got the whole story. Then he phoned Nick back and asked him to take care of it. We could have taken you yesterday when you walked into Arnie's place, but Nick said not to gyp Arnie out of his fee. Arnie don't even know his passport and stuff ain't going to be used by you, of course. Nick don't take him into his confidence."

Tompkins opened his mouth to explain that he wasn't the man they were looking for, but the roar of the gun cut him off.

The car slowed, the door opened, and he was kicked out into the alley.



*In this modern age, one still finds applicable the philosophy of Sophocles, "... for of mortals most find friendship an unstable anchorage."*



ADAM CARLSON listened to the faint howl of a dog, and fifteen seconds later he heard the hum of an airplane. The sound of the motors grew rapidly louder until the plane passed directly over the house.

In the glare of the naked overhead bulb, he glanced at his watch. 2:32 A.M.

Adam sat up on the cot and

stared about the room once again. Twelve feet by fourteen. No windows. Solid concrete block construction except for the heavy oak door. Almost soundproof, but not quite. The dog must be fairly near.

How long had he been here? It seemed like days, but actually it had been only about eight hours. It had begun yesterday

evening. Where would it end?

Adam had just put his car into the garage and begun the walk up the long path to the house when they stepped out of the darkness. There had been two of them, both hooded, and they held guns.

He had been startled, of course, but not really frightened. His hands had gone above his head. "Take the money, but leave the wallet." He had been thinking about the nuisance of getting duplicates of his driver's license and various other cards and identifications if the wallet were taken.

But they hadn't been concerned about his wallet or the money. The tall heavy-set man had merely indicated with the automatic that he wanted Adam to walk ahead of them.

They had gone back down the driveway, past the two gate posts, and to the dark sedan parked by the side of the gravel road.

Adam had been blindfolded and bound and put on the floor in the rear of the car. At first he had tried to keep track of the direction in which they drove. But they had turned again and again until he had become confused and given up.

After an hour the car had stopped and the ropes had been removed from his ankles. With

the blindfold still on, he had been led along a path and he had heard a door being opened. He had been guided down a flight of stairs and into this room.

When they untied his hands and removed the blindfold, he had blinked at the sudden light. As his eyes adjusted he had seen the bare room with its cot, its single chair, its table, and the pen and paper.

The big man had spoken for the first time. "Sit down," he ordered. "You're going to write a note to your wife. We're asking for two hundred thousand dollars."

Adam had stared at the hooded figures. "Two hundred thousand dollars?"

Perhaps there had been a smile behind the hood. "That's right, mister. Maybe you got it figured out by now why we picked you up."

Adam had licked his lips. "My wife left for Europe last week with her mother."

The two hooded men had looked at each other. Did they seem uncertain? The big man had raised the gun. "We want the two hundred thousand. We don't care how you get it or who gets it for you, but we want it."

Adam had sat down at the table. "Harold Bannister. He's my

lawyer and long-time counselor." The gun moved again. "Pick up the pen. I'll tell you what words to use."

And Adam had written:  
Dear Harold:

I want you to get two hundred thousand dollars together, none of it in bills larger than one-hundreds.

You will be phoned instructions about what to do with it later.

Do not notify the police. If you do, you will never see me alive again.

Adam Carlson

The big man had read the note and then nodded. He and his partner had left the room and Adam had heard the heavy door being locked.

Now Adam lay down on the cot once again. He closed his eyes against the glare of the single bare bulb overhead.

Would they kill him after they got the money? But if that was their intention, why would they bother to wear the hoods? Adam grasped at that. As long as they wore the hoods—as long as they took the pains to make sure that he could not identify them later—his life was safe.

Adam woke with a start as he heard a key in the door. He glanced at his watch. Eight twenty-

five. He'd managed to fall asleep. He felt his heart pounding as he watched the door open.

The big man entered alone with a tray. And he was still hooded. "Your breakfast," he said.

He waited until Adam indicated that he'd eaten as much as he wanted and then took the blindfold out of his pocket. "You're going to phone your office. Tell your secretary that you won't be in for at least a week. Tell her you're taking a trip."

He was led to a spot just outside the door.

"What's your number?" the big man asked.

Adam told him and then heard the dialing. He felt the phone thrust into his hand. His secretary, Madge, answered the rings. "Madge," Adam said, "I won't be in for about a week. I'm taking a little vacation trip."

"Yes, sir," she said. "Where can I reach you in case I have to?"

"You won't have to," Adam said. "Just put everything off. Cancel all my appointments."

The big man took the phone from him. "Maybe there's somebody else you ought to call, too? Just remember, for your own health we wouldn't want anybody getting worried about you and telling the police."

Adam thought for a moment. "My housekeeper." He gave the big man his number and the phone was once again put into his hand.

"Mrs. Regan?"

"Yes," she said. "Is that you, Mr. Carlson?"

"Yes."

"Where are you? This morning when you didn't come down for breakfast, I got worried. I sent James looking for you, but he couldn't find you. He said that you must have come home last night though, because all the cars are in the garage."

"I did," Adam said. "But I left again early this morning. A friend of mine picked me up at the gate." He took a breath. "Mrs. Regan, I won't be home for about a week. Just taking sort of a vacation."

"All right," she said. "But a letter from your wife came in yesterday afternoon's mail. I left it on the hall table, but I guess you missed it."

"Yes," Adam said. "I guess I did."

"You'll want to pick it up before you go, won't you?"

"No. Just keep it until I get back."

There was a slight pause. "I could send it on to where you're staying?"

"No," Adam said. "I don't know exactly where that will be. I'll be on the road most of the time."

The big man led him back into the room and removed the blind-fold. In the evening, his partner brought Adam supper.

They probably take turns guarding the door, Adam thought; the big man during the day and the little man during the night.

Adam spoke. "Have you heard anything from Bannister yet?"

The small man shook his head. He waited for Adam to eat. Impatiently, it seemed. He had the habit of pinching the knuckles of his right hand.

In the morning, the big man brought Adam breakfast.

Adam first sipped some coffee. "Have . . . have you gotten the money yet?"

The big man shook his head. "No. We're giving Bannister until Thursday."

The hours, the days, and the nights passed slowly. And then on Thursday afternoon when the big man entered the room, his voice was harsh. "Bannister's stalling." He removed the blind-fold from his pocket. "I'm going to let you talk to him and you'd better be convincing. Tell him to have the money by noon tomorrow."

row or he can forget about the whole thing. Do you understand what I mean?"

Adam wiped perspiration from his hands. "Yes. I understand."

At the phone, Adam waited until he got Bannister and then said, "Harold, why haven't you got the money?"

"Adam?" Bannister said. "Is that you?"

"Yes."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes," Adam said. "I'm all right. But they say that you're stalling."

Bannister hesitated. "No, Adam. But getting that much cash takes a little time. And I've been thinking, your Altiline Chemicals is at 28½ now. I thought that if we could wait until just Monday there might be an upturn."

"Sell it," Adam snapped. "Right now."

Bannister sighed. "All right, Adam. And about your share in the Shore Apartments, the best offer I can get now is \$75,000 from Rogers."

"Let him have it." Adam gripped the phone. "Harold, you've got to have the money by noon tomorrow. If you don't have it by then, it will be too late."

The line was silent for five seconds. "I understand, Adam."

I'll get it together somehow. You can count on me."

At one the next afternoon when the big man brought him his lunch, Adam rose from the cot. "Did Bannister get the money?"

The big man grunted. "We phoned and he says he has. But we'll find out for sure when we make the pickup tonight." He put the tray on the table. "Better pray that nothing goes wrong."

It was past ten that evening when Adam heard the key in the door lock. He found his heart pounding. Both of the men entered and they were still hooded.

Ten minutes later Adam found himself once again bound and blindfolded and lying in the back of a car. It seemed to him that they drove endlessly, but at last the car stopped. He was dragged out and thrown on the grass beside the road.

Adam waited, stiff with dread at what might happen in the next moment. Then he heard the car drive away.

He lay there for a minute breathing deeply with relief and then began working at his bonds. When he was free, he stood up. The night was bright with a full moon and half a mile down the country road he could make out the dark shape of a farmhouse and a barn. He began walking

toward them to ask for help.

It was after two in the morning before the police finished questioning Adam. When he was released, he found Harold Bannister waiting.

Bannister looked tired. "The police have been at me, Adam. Claim I should have reported the kidnapping to them when I got your note."

Outside the building, they got into Bannister's car. Adam rubbed his eyes. He was weary, but still too tense for sleep. "I could stand a drink."

Bannister turned the ignition key. "There's probably nothing open at this hour, but you can try one of my martinis."

Twenty minutes later, in Bannister's livingroom, Adam sat down in an easy chair and tried to relax. Bannister went to the liquor cabinet. "The one who phoned me had a mid-western accent. Definitely a mid-western accent. What about the other one?"

"I don't know," Adam said. "I never heard him say a word."

Then Adam heard the howling of the dog.

He stiffened as he caught the sound of the approaching plane. The noise grew and grew until the plane roared overhead.

Adam looked at his watch. 2:32 A.M.

His eyes widened. He had heard the dog and that airplane at the same time every night since Monday.

At the liquor cabinet, Bannister surveyed the bottles. "Now where the devil is that vermouth?" Absently he pinched the knuckles of his right hand.

"Ah," he said. "Here it is." He picked up the bottle and turned. "Well, let's hope that the police catch up with your kidnappers."

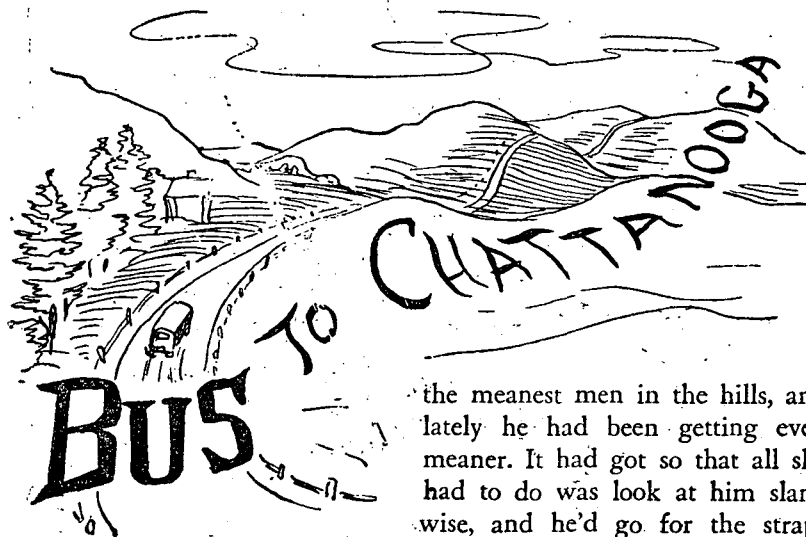
Adam had been staring at the floor, almost seeing the small room that must be in the basement. Now he looked up at the small lawyer. He smiled faintly "Yes," he said. "I have a feeling they will."



*Trip-wires and man-pits may not constitute a better mousetrap, but one need not necessarily be concerned with the mechanism if it achieves its objective.*

**J**ANIE JUNE HIBBINS was still sore from the strapping Uncle Elmore had given her yesterday afternoon, and every so often she would wince a little and shift her position in the rocker. It was hard to sew by the light of the coal-oil lamp, but she had had a lot of practice at it and she was within a few stitches of finishing the white cotton dress she was patterning on the one in the Sears, Roebuck catalogue.

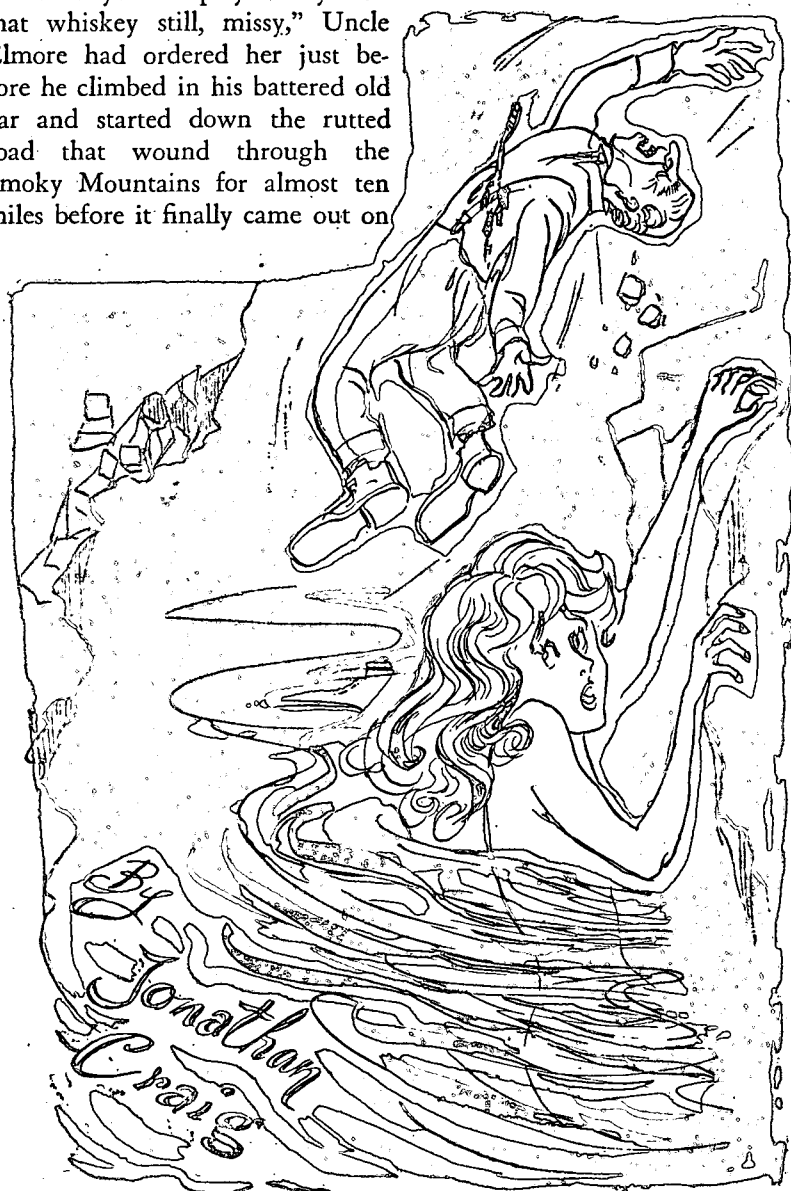
It wasn't as if she'd done anything wrong, she reflected as she changed her position again. She hadn't. It was just that there weren't enough hours in the day to do all the work Uncle Elmore figured a healthy young girl ought to do. She didn't know how much longer she could stand it. Ever since Ma and Pa had died and Uncle Elmore had moved in, life had been just plain miserable. Uncle Elmore had always been one of



the meanest men in the hills, and lately he had been getting even meaner. It had got so that all she had to do was look at him slantwise, and he'd go for the strap.



"Mind you keep your eye on that whiskey still, missy," Uncle Elmore had ordered her just before he climbed in his battered old car and started down the rutted road that wound through the Smoky Mountains for almost ten miles before it finally came out on



the highway to Chattanooga. "I want that mash cooked right and proper. If it ain't, I'll be giving you a birthday present you won't like one little bit."

"Yes, sir, Uncle Elmore," Janie June had said.

"And don't be leaving the cabin after sundown. I don't want no female kin of mine spooning around in the dark with any of these young bucks around here. You hear me, girl?"

"Yes, sir."

"You better remember it, too. Unless you crave a whupping for a birthday present. How old will you be, anyhow?"

"Eighteen."

"Well, that ain't going to keep you from getting whupped. And being the prettiest girl on the mountain ain't going to keep you from it, neither. You just better learn to step a sight more lively, Janie June Hibbins."

"Oh, I will, Uncle Elmore."

"Fetch me a jar of 'shine. I plumb forgot."

Janie ran into the cabin, grabbed up one of the quart fruit jars she had just filled with corn whiskey, and rushed back to the car.

"Mind what I told you," Uncle Elmore called back as the car rattled off. "I don't keep that strap hanging on the wall just for show, you know."

Now, as Janie June took the last stitch in the hem of the dress and knotted the thread, she heard the banjo clock in the other room strike three. It was later than she'd thought, and she hurriedly hung up the dress and blew out the lamp and crossed to the window to watch for the bus to Chattanooga.

The bus came along up there on Piney Ridge at a few minutes after three, and on nights when Janie June was too troubled in her mind to sleep, she liked to watch for it and dream about how wonderful it would be if only she had enough money to run off to Chattanooga where there weren't any Uncle Elmores, or smelly whiskey stills, or hard work from sun to sun, or strappings that left a girl so sore she could hardly sit down. There was a full moon tonight, and Piney Ridge was so bright that Janie June could see almost as well as if it were daytime.

Just beneath the crest of the ridge, straight across from the cabin, Janie June saw something which made her forget about the bus completely. There, on the abandoned road that led down from the ridge through Nuzum's Notch, a car was moving very slowly with its lights out. As she watched, the car halted by the

mouth of the China River Cave, where she had played so often as a child, and two men got out. She could tell they were men, but no more than that. They moved quickly, their shadowy forms merging briefly with the larger shadow of the car before they separated from it again and started toward the cave. But now they were carrying something between them, something that looked very much like another man. They were swallowed by the black shadow at the mouth of the cave for a few moments; then the two of them came back alone, took what appeared to be a half-filled gunnysack from the car, and went back into the cave again. This time, they stayed inside much longer. When they came out, neither of them carried anything. They got into the car, still without having made a sound of any kind, and let the car coast down the road for a long way before they started the engine.

Janie June stared across the hollow at the black mouth of the cave, stark against the silver-gray of the moonwash on the surrounding rocks, for almost a full minute.

A person would be crazy to go up there, she told herself. A person would have to be touched, even to think about it.

She was still telling herself this as she went out to the other room, took down the lantern from the nail on the wall, picked up some matches from the box beside the cookstove, and set out for the cave.

She had been running up and down these hills all her life, and except for slowing down a little when she circled the grove where Uncle Elmore had his still, and which he had surrounded with trip-wires and deep, covered man-pits as a protection against revenue agents and Sheriff Orv Loonsey, she ran all the way.

China River Cave—called that because, it was said, the small but rapid river inside it went all the way to China—wasn't much bigger than the cabin. Janie June lighted the lantern, set it on a rock, and looked about her.

There was nothing there. Janie June knew the cave as well as she knew her own room, and there was no place where even a half-filled gunnysack could have been hidden, much less a man's body. She picked up the lantern again and walked over to the edge of the underground river and stood looking down at the raging water. The river poured through the cave so fast that the water seemed to boil, and Janie June shuddered a little with the thought of what

had happened to the man the other two had carried into the cave. The current would have sucked him out of sight in a second, and now the onrushing river would speed him through the bowels of the earth forever.

As Janie June turned away to leave, the lantern glinted on something in the dust just in front of her, and she picked it up. It was a narrow gold tie-clasp with the name *Duke* engraved on it in very small script. She studied it thoughtfully, and then threw it in the river. She wouldn't want anyone to know she'd seen *that*, because then they might suspect she'd seen a whole lot more. She put out the lantern and left the cave.

As she started down the slope, Janie June saw headlights on the road that led to the cabin. They were still a long way off, but they were coming fast. That would be Uncle Elmore's car, she knew, and if she meant to reach the cabin before he did, she'd really have to hurry. What he'd do if he found her gone was just too awful to think about.

It was a good thing her skirt was so short, she reflected as she ran across Froggy Bottom and started up the opposite slope toward the cabin; this was no time to be hampered. She ran faster

than she ever had before, even in the daytime, and every time she came to one of Uncle Elmore's trip-wires or covered man-pits, she leaped right over it, rather than lose the time it would take to run around it. But still, she had to circle around in back of the cabin, to keep herself out of the headlights of the approaching car, and she reached her bedroom window only half a minute before the car pulled into the yard. By the time she'd climbed inside, Uncle Elmore and some other man were already stomping across the creaking planks of the front porch.

Then Uncle Elmore was hammering on her door. "Wake up in there," he yelled. He was drunk, she could tell. Real drunk.

"That you, Uncle Elmore?" she called, trying to make her voice sound as if she'd only just awakened.

"You know durn good and well who it is," Uncle Elmore said. "Get yourself on out here, girl. We got company."

Janie June waited about as long as it would have taken her to put on her dress, and then she went out into the other room.

"Breakfast," Uncle Elmore said as soon as she appeared. "And don't let the grass grow, neither." He was bald and toothless, but his

shoulders and chest were enormous, and when he moved his arms, the bulging muscles writhed beneath the freckled skin like so many snakes. He was sitting at the table with another, much younger man, and right now he had that mean grin on his face, the one he always got when he was mighty pleased with himself. "Eggs and ham and grits and taters and some of them damson preserves," he said. "Stir your stumps, Janie June."

"Yes, sir, Uncle Elmore," Janie June said as she hurried over to the cookstove.

The young man sitting at the table with Uncle Elmore had dark hair and eyes and a small, neat mustache, and he was every bit as good looking as Uncle Elmore was ugly. He smiled at Janie June and started to get to his feet.

Uncle Elmore laughed scornfully. "No need to get up for *her*," he said. "That's only Janie June. My niece."

"Good Lord," the man said softly.

"What in tarnation's wrong with you, Burt?" Uncle Elmore asked.

"You didn't tell me your niece was so pretty," Burt said.

"All it does is make her sassy," Uncle Elmore said.

"I never would have believed it," Burt said, staring at Janie

June, occupied with her cooking.

"Hurry up with them victuals, girl," Uncle Elmore said as he turned on the old battery radio on the table. "I figure there just might be something interesting on the radio—eh, Burt?"

"Maybe so," Burt said. "My name's Burt Connor, Janie June."

"I'm right pleased to meet you," Janie June said.

Harsh and strident guitar music filled the room, and Uncle Elmore turned the radio down a little. "Fetch us a jar of shine, girl," he said.

Janie June took a jar of whiskey and two water glasses to the table and went back to the stove.

"You got a steady boy friend, Janie June?" Burt asked.

"No, sir," Janie June said.

Uncle Elmore laughed. "You're growing calf eyes, I swear, Burt," he said, filling his glass. "You must've seen a girl or two *some* time or other."

"I've seen a lot of them," Burt said. "But I never saw one as—"

"Hush!" Uncle Elmore said, the glass halfway to his mouth. "Listen."

"... and the Chattanooga police still have no leads in the robbery and abduction of notorious gambler Duke Mahannah," the voice on the radio was saying. "Informed sources, however, have

revealed that Mahannah's wall safe, which his kidnapers apparently forced him to open, contained almost thirty thousand dollars. . . . And now your Nightowl Newscaster would like just a moment of your time to tell you about—"

Uncle Elmore switched off the radio, downed the entire glass of moonshine in two long swallows, and winked at Burt.

"Well, now, what do you think of that?" he said. "Dang if it don't look like somebody's gone and stole that poor man's thirty thousand dollars." He shook his head and clucked his tongue. "Course, you can't believe everything you hear on the radio; now can you?"

Burt smiled; his eyes still on Janie June. "No," he said. "You sure can't." He drank some of his whiskey, coughed, and drank some more. "You make good liquor, Elmore."

"Well, thanks," Uncle Elmore said. "I take my pains with it. Janie June, what's slowing up them victuals?"

"Don't rush her," Burt said.

"I'll rush her with a strap," Uncle Elmore said.

"Oh, you wouldn't do that," Burt said, laughing.

"I wouldn't eh?" Uncle Elmore said, reaching for the fruit jar.

"How about some more shine in that glass, Burt?"

"Thanks," Burt said. "I don't mind if I do."

"Too bad we ain't got anything to celebrate, eh, Burt?" Uncle Elmore said, grinning broadly.

Burt grinned, too. "Yes, isn't it?" he said.

"Hurry up with that food," girl," Uncle Elmore said.

"Yes, Uncle Elmore," Janie June said. "It's all ready." She filled two plates at the stove and carried them to the table. "Can I go back to bed now, Uncle Elmore?" she asked.

"Why not stay up with us a while?" Burt said. "You like to dance, Janie June?"

"Go on to bed," Uncle Elmore said. "I want you peart and lively tomorrow. You hear?"

"Yes, sir," Janie June said as she opened the door of her room. "I was real glad to meet you, Mr. Connor."

"The same," Burt said, smiling. "I'll be seeing you again, Janie June. In fact, I just might be seeing you a lot."

Janie June bolted the door behind her and lay down on her bed with her clothes on and listened to the voices in the other room. An hour crawled by as the voices grew thicker and sleepier and the silences came oftener and

lasted longer. Then there was a silence that stretched on for several minutes, and finally Uncle Elmore began to snore. When Janie June tiptoed to the door and put her eye to the crack between it and the jamb, she saw that Uncle Elmore was asleep on his cot and Burt Connor was asleep at the table, his head resting on his forearm and his mouth slightly pursed, as if he were whistling.

Well, Janie June reflected as she crawled out the window, Uncle Elmore and Burt Connor wouldn't have thrown a bag of money in the river, the way they had poor Mr. Duke Mahannah's body, and that was for sure. She knew now what they'd done with the money—the only thing they *could* have done with it.

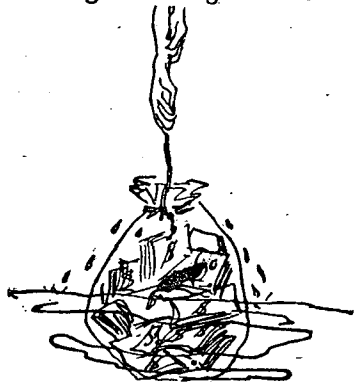
Twenty minutes later, the lantern beside her, Janie June was lying flat on her stomach beside the rushing water in the China River Cave, her arm in the water up to the elbow, feeling along the knobby surface of the undercut rock beneath her, probing for what she knew had to be there.

At last she found it—a taut wire tied to a fist-sized projection on the rock. The pull of the current on whatever was on the other end of the wire was so strong that the wire almost cut her fingers as she drew it up hand over hand, and

if she hadn't been such a strong girl for her size she wouldn't have been able to pull it up at all.

It wasn't a gunnysack on the end of the wire, but a clear plastic bag as big as one, and it was more than half full of paper money.

Just as Janie June started to undo the wire from the gathered top of the bag, she thought she heard something. Her fingers seemed to



freeze on the wire, and she crouched there, motionless, not even breathing. She heard it again—the sound of pebbles dislodged from the slope beneath the cave.

It had to be either Uncle Elmore or Burt Connor, she knew. Whoever it was, he'd kill her for sure. He'd know she knew what had happened to poor Mr. Duke Mahannah, and he'd kill her and throw her in the river.

She'd never thought so fast in her life. Whoever it was, he would

already have seen the light of the lantern, so there was no use trying to do anything about that. But if he didn't already know who was in the cave, she still had a chance to keep from being caught.

That chance was to hide in the water. And since a wet dress would give her away later, she'd have to take it off. She dropped the bag of money back into the river, and then whipped the dress—which was all she had on—over her head and wedged it into the crevice between two rocks, where no one could see it. Then she slid into the water, and, making sure of each handhold before she trusted her life to it, worked herself back beneath the overhanging stone shelf of the river bank, just as she had done so many times in play when she was a little girl. Only her head and shoulders were above the hissing surface of the water now, and she hooked her fingers over a small ridge in the rock and fought the savage tow of the current that threatened to tear her hands loose at any second and send her hurtling through the earth for all eternity.

She heard the hollow pound of heavy boots in the cave, and then Uncle Elmore's surprised curse when he found no one there.

Swearing to himself steadily, Uncle Elmore began to pull up the wire attached to the money bag. The bag broke through the surface of the water, and a moment later Janie June heard the soft plop as Uncle Elmore dropped it on the cave floor.

Uncle Elmore's swearing broke off abruptly. "Burt!" he said. "I didn't hear you come in."

"I didn't mean for you to," Burt Connor's voice said. His voice was flat and cold, not at all the way it had been back at the cabin. "Caught you red-handed, didn't I?"

"What the Sam Hill are you talking about?" Uncle Elmore demanded.

Burt's laugh was ugly. "I kind of figured on you double-crossing me; but I didn't think it'd be so soon."

"Listen here—" Uncle Elmore began. "Hey, now! What're you doing with that knife?"

"You're a dead man, Elmore," Burt said. "Did you know that?"

"You got me wrong, Burt," Uncle Elmore said, his voice breaking. "I wasn't going to take the money. I seen a light up here and I—"

"Stop lying," Burt said.

"Get away from me with that knife, Burt!" Uncle Elmore yelled. "Don't do it, Burt! Burt,



listen to me, I swear I never—”

“Good-by, Elmore,” Burt said, and then Uncle Elmore’s body splashed into the water only a yard from Janie June’s head, and in spite of herself, Janie June heard herself gasp.

The next instant, a big, hard hand had fastened on her wrist and was pulling her out of the water.

But when Burt had hauled her up beside him and saw that she was completely naked, he gaped at her in stunned disbelief and forgot for an instant to retain his viselike grip on her wrist. That instant was all Janie June needed to jerk away from him and dart for the mouth of the cave. Burt lunged after her, but his clutching hands slipped off her wet body and he could not hold her.

Down the slope she raced, with Burt just behind her. His legs were longer than hers, but she knew every foot of the way and he did not. If only she could reach the cabin before he caught her, she could grab the rifle from over the fireplace and keep him from killing her.

And then, just as she was almost halfway across Froggy Bottom, she slipped on the dew-slick grass and fell. She was up and running again almost at once, but now Burt was only a few

steps behind her. As she started up the slope to the cabin, she cast a terrified glance over her shoulder and saw that he was even closer than she had thought, the knife in his hand flashing horribly in the moonlight. She’d never reach the cabin now, she knew; she was as good as dead this very second.

And then she remembered. The pits! The brush-covered man-pits around the grove where Uncle Elmore had his still!

The nearest pit was only a dozen yards away. She veered toward it, and at the last instant swerved to one side, hoping that Burt would crash through the thin layer of brush and fall into the deep pit below.

But it was not to be. Burt had changed his own course when he saw her change hers, and his pounding feet skirted the pit by inches.

He had her now for sure, Janie June knew. There wasn’t any other pit she could lead him to without doubling back the way she had come. She could already imagine the knife sinking into her back, and she heard herself begin to whimper. She tried to run even faster.

Then she felt another sudden surge of hope, and she *did* run faster. She’d forgotten about the

trip-wires. There was one in the ankle-deep grass thirty yards ahead. It was the last one between here and the cabin, and it would be the last chance she'd have to save her life.

She reached the trip-wire a heartbeat before Burt did, leaped over it, and sprinted on. Burt's foot caught on the wire and he went sprawling headlong, his body skidding across the wet grass to come to a sudden stop against a stump.

Janie June ran into the cabin, jerked the rifle off the wall, and ran back out. She'd just have to shoot Mr. Connor, she guessed; there didn't seem to be any other way to keep him from killing her.

Burt Connor lay completely still, and as Janie June cautiously approached him, she saw that his neck was bent at an odd angle and that his eyes were wide open, staring at nothing. He was dead, she realized; the fall had broken his neck.

Janie June stood looking down at him for a long moment, and

then she took a deep breath and let it out very slowly. She would have to put Mr. Connor's body in the river, and that was going to be an awful chore. She wouldn't have any trouble getting it down the slope to Froggy Bottom, of course, and towing it across the slippery grass in the hollow wouldn't be too hard, either. But pulling it up the far slope to the cave was going to be mighty tiring work.

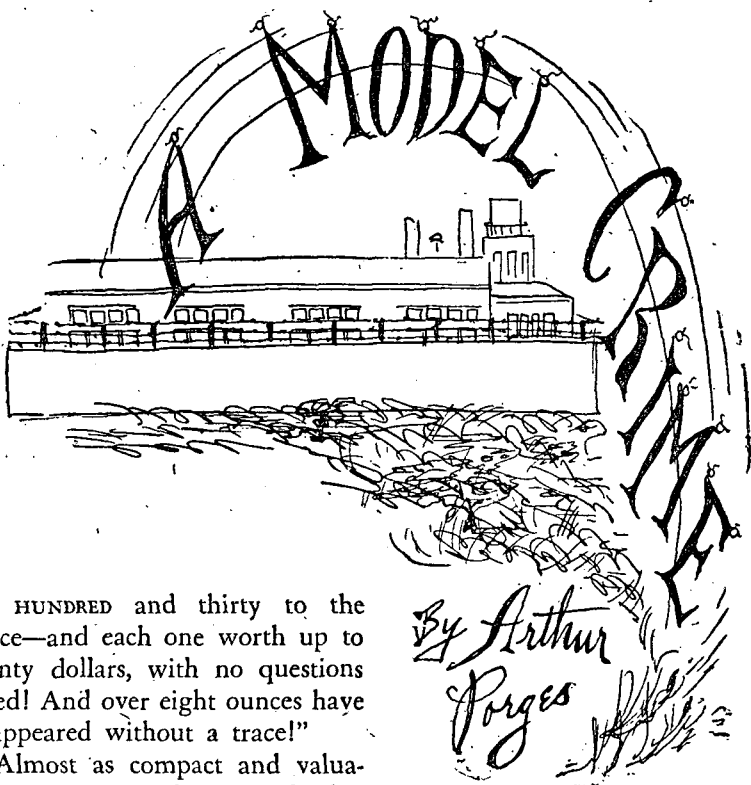
Three hours later, when Janie June waved down the bus on top of Piney Ridge and climbed aboard, she was wearing her new white cotton dress and carrying Uncle Elmore's scuffed, twine-bound cardboard suitcase.

She found an empty seat, put the suitcase on her lap, and sat smiling out the window as the big bus roared back to life and started off down the mountain on its way to Chattanooga.

"Look how tight that girl's holding on to that old wreck of a suitcase," she heard a woman across the aisle whisper. "You'd think she had a fortune in there."



*Transposing sentiment into the relatively harsh realm of business economics, one finds that, according to Browning, "Life's a little thing!"*



**A** HUNDRED and thirty to the ounce—and each one worth up to twenty dollars, with no questions asked! And over eight ounces have disappeared without a trace!”

“Almost as compact and valuable as dope,” Professor Middlebie said thoughtfully, shifting his bandaged ankle to a softer spot on the hassock. “Ironical, in a way, that two things so different in purpose and consumption should

share such qualities as lightness and high cost. Are you sure of those figures?” he demanded, head cocked, grey eyes steady. “They seem a bit remarkable, even for

transistors, small as they are."

"I'm giving it to you just as I heard it," Sergeant Black said, looking slightly hurt at the suggestion that he, of all people, was a fallible witness. "They're like pinheads, with two hair wires coming out. Precision made; custom made; you ought to see the place. Dust-free, air pressure inside so that nothing can blow in; and all the technicians wear lintless coveralls."

"Well," Middlebie said, "If you want me to try another Mycroft—we didn't do too badly on that locked room murder a few weeks ago, at that," he interjected with just a trace of complacency—"I'm willing. Maybe I should quit while I'm ahead. Armchair deduction is chancy stuff, with a big element of luck. But, frankly, I'm sick of being immobilized, especially with all the migrants flying through the valley." He shot a wistful glance at his binoculars, lying on the sill of the old-fashioned bay window.

"Good," Black said. Then a rather puzzled expression crossed his face. "You know," he said slowly, "I've taken you at your word—I mean as to your qualities. I've thought of you as the scientist who coldly, logically, examines all the possible hypotheses that account for the tricky facts, and then selects the best one—presumably the only one—after which I do the final leg

work to get legal evidence." He paused, and the professor, once a lecturer on the History and Philosophy of Science, and now an occasional crime consultant for his former pupil, raised a pair of bushy eyebrows.

"And now you have another opinion?" the older man asked.

"In a way. Sure, you see everything with a naturalist's eye, and you have the scientific background to interpret all the data. But," he added triumphantly, "basically it's your imagination that's so good! Forming those hypotheses is a matter of invention, speculation. The fact is, Professor, you're as much an artist as a scientist."

"Thank you," Middlebie said drily. "The most casual study of past discoveries in science would have taught you that with much less effort on your part. Every successful investigator has had to have as much imagination as technical skill. Once you come up with a really brilliant idea—like Mendel's, or Einstein's—any one of hundreds, with no imaginations of their own, can check it out. But while you're working out a philosophy of science," he added, smiling, "those transistors are getting farther away every minute."

"Ouch!" Black said. "Here's the story, brief and to the point.

"Three days ago, at Morton Elec-

tronics, eight ounces of transistors turned up missing. The company can't make 'em fast enough to satisfy the demand. They're the best available, custom-built by the finest technicians around. Morton uses most of them in its own products, but whenever there's a surplus—usually very small—they sell the transistors alone. The going price is twenty dollars each. So eight ounces, at a hundred and thirty to the ounce, are worth about twenty-one thousand dollars—quite a haul. Besides, on the black market, the thief might get as much as fifty thousand.

"The factory makes a lot of valuable stuff—the best oscilloscopes, special radio receivers, things for satellites—small items that are worth a lot of money. So they're careful; they have to be. Nobody takes anything out, and even what they bring in is inspected—don't ask me why."

"I could think of one reason already," Middlebie said with a kind of boyish glee.

"What's that?"

"A catapult, or crossbow—to shoot a package of transistors fifty or a hundred yards away from the building, to be picked up later."

"Say-y-y," the sergeant said, "that's damned good." Then he shook his head. "But it wouldn't work. It's a big plant; you'd have

to shoot a couple of blocks to get anything from the factory to the nearest fence—which is twelve feet high, topped by barbed wire, guarded day and night, and floodlit, too!"

"How dependable are the guards?"

"The best. You may have heard of the Safeguard Organization. They've never had a crook working for them. Their men are gradually given more responsibility and top wages. Nothing doing there. Oh, we're checking, too, but I don't expect any weak links."

"All right," Middlebie said, "since we're back with the Socratic method again, let me ask you this. Are all the people who work in the factory possible suspects?"

"No, luckily. Only five men—the chief engineers of various departments—have access to the room where the transistors were stolen. The other employees sign for every item of that sort from supply."

"Tell me about the chosen five."

"Well, they're high-paid experts, naturally. Each has a private office."

"Really private?"

"So I gathered," Black said. "The doors can be locked, and often are, since some of the engineers keep secret and very valuable blueprints handy. They're often working on special projects of their own. Some

of the offices are almost like labs."

"Secretaries come in and out, surely."

"Some have to knock first, unless they've been rung for. You know how these young geniuses act at times. If they don't want to be bothered, even the president of the company may cool his heels outside."

Middlebie was silent for a moment, a cloudy look in his eyes.

"No chance, I take it, of smuggling the transistors out."

"None," Black said crisply. "A complete change of clothes before leaving. Maybe the president is exempt—I didn't check that—but nobody else."

"Could they have gone out in small batches?"

"No. It was easy to pin down the time. All eight ounces were taken Wednesday night."

"You mean they work such hours?"

"Around the clock. As I said, they can't turn out the stuff fast enough, and the overtime pay could buy a nuclear submarine."

"Hmmp!" the professor said, a narrow furrow appearing in his brow. "Could they still be hidden in the plant anywhere?"

"I don't see how. The place is on a dust-free routine, so that everything is rounded, smooth, polished, and cleaned a million times a

week. There simply are no lockers, cabinets, or the like—they'd be bad dust catchers. The factory's like one big tiled bathroom—or even more like the inside of a refrigerator, with the shelves and gadgets out."

"This would send even Mycroft's blood pressure up," Middlebie said ruefully. "Maybe that's why Holmes consulted him only a few times—two, I think. What about the five suspects? Did all of them go to the supply room that day?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"And were all of them out of sight when the transistors disappeared?"

"Fortunately, no. Two were with colleagues or secretaries."

"So, really, there are just three main suspects."

"I suppose so." Black sounded doubtful. "It's not that clear-cut. Maybe even with others around somebody had a clever way to work it. How can I say, without the faintest idea to start on?"

"Well," the professor said judiciously, "I think it's time for the essential leg work. Even Mycroft needed Sherlock's data to accomplish anything."

"Fine," Black said in a somewhat sour voice. "What do I look for?"

"Anything unusual that anybody might have seen, heard, felt, smelled, or inferred psychological-

ly. That includes people—especially children, who are the most curious of individuals—who live near the plant.”

“How about the ones overhead?” the sergeant suggested, his voice even more sour.

“Overhead? What do you mean?”

“A plane flies over the factory every night at 8:45—it’s bound for San Francisco, from Los Angeles”—here Black’s tone became a sing-song chant—“with a crew of five, and forty passengers. It flies at twelve thousand feet at a speed of —”

“I get the point,” Middlebie said. “You don’t feel that they let down a rope for the loot, nor do you suspect they swooped low the way planes picked up agents in enemy territory during the war—hooking a man off the ground in a harness.”

“If you—” the sergeant began, but the professor, still smiling, continued.

“Nor do you believe they could have seen or heard anything in the dark at twelve thousand feet. Do you know what I think?”

“What?” Black was thoroughly bewildered.

“I agree one hundred per cent.” Then, in a serious voice, “But please ask around as I suggested, and then report back. Meanwhile, I’ll use that imagination you overly

praised a few minutes ago. Before you go, get me a beer from the refrigerator. I need some high-test brain fuel.”

As Black left, the professor was mixing the horrible tippie he favored: beer, whiskey, and brown sugar—called by some, Bullfrog Gin; drink a little, hop a little, and croak.

He sipped the concoction, gave a small sigh of pleasure, and gave his imagination free rein. A guarded factory; a competent engineer; eight ounces of treasure sent through, around, or over all barriers—how? Middlebie began to jot down some possible answers . . .

When Black returned the following evening, he had nothing to report. Nobody had seen or heard a thing, except for the regularly scheduled plane already mentioned.

“We’re not going to get any eyewitnesses, that’s certain,” the sergeant said gloomily. “And not much evidence of any kind. Talk about a case for pure reason, this is it in spades!”

“Let’s plug a few more holes,” Middlebie told him. “What about the stuff being shipped out in some routine consignment—radios, amplifiers, that sort of thing.”

“I thought of that. They inspect everything several times—perform-

ance tests, completeness, the works. Besides, the engineers have no direct dealings with the shipping room, and if one of them had been around there, even for a minute, we'd know about it."

"All right. Then, this: what's the size of an eight-ounce parcel of transistors?"

"Fairly bulky. They're sealed in little plastic pods to keep out air, dust—anything that might hurt 'em. I'm told the crook must have carried out a package about the size of a cigarette carton—maybe a bit smaller, if the things were compressed."

"That's very interesting," the professor said. "It means almost certainly that they weren't taken out on the thief's person; not with the kind of inspection you described. So I'm back, oddly enough, to my first rather wild speculations. Never underrate intuition, my boy."

"I don't follow you," Black said.

"Sherlock Holmes had a dictum, often discussed, to the effect that when one has eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, is the answer. The rule actually avoids the main difficulty, for who is qualified to know when *all* the impossible solutions have been considered? That little word 'all' has bedeviled logicians for centuries." Then, seeing

the sergeant's glassy stare, he added, "Sorry. All I mean is that we're narrowing down the number of reasonable solutions."

"So that's *all* you mean," Black grinned. "The word again!"

Middlebie ignored him.

"I need more data," he said briskly. "Find out what kind of equipment each suspect has in his office, particularly if there's anything for metal working, like a jeweler's lathe, or the like. And then"—here the sergeant groaned—"get me the most complete dossier possible on each engineer, going well back in time."

"Like how many times they asked to be excused in third grade?"

"If the information is available," was the bland reply.

Black didn't delve quite that deeply, but after a week he brought back a thick folder on each man. The professor read each one through with great patience, missing very little. Finally, in a high school yearbook—how in the world had Black come up with that?—he found something concrete.

"By the way, on that equipment question," he asked the sergeant. "Does Brenner have a lathe in his office?"

"No," was the prompt reply. "A lot of electronic stuff, and plenty



of tools, but nothing to turn metal."

"You're sure—it might be inside the desk."

"It isn't. And in addition, he never had one. I checked that on my own," Black said reproachfully.

"Do they use any gasoline in the plant?"

"Not that I know of. They have a special solvent for cleaning parts, though."

"Himph." The professor's expression suggested he was at a dead end. "No metal; that means no engine, even with gas available." He held out the yearbook. "See that?"

Black studied the blurry photo, and his jaw muscles knotted.

He said. "You think—but that's impossible!"

"That's a model plane, and the yearbook mentions how far advanced young Brenner was in that field, back in '45. Yet, in these recent biographical notes you and your men made, he never said a word about such a hobby. Why should he hide it now?"

"Maybe he just outgrew it."

"Maybe. We'll see." Middlebie pointed to a shelf. "Get me that thick, reddish book."

The sergeant did so, and the old man riffled the pages. Then he stabbed one triumphantly.

"Aha! Who won third place for

endurance only eight years ago? R. T. Brenner. And was the plane radio-controlled? You bet your sweet life!"

"But—but—" Black sounded like an outboard motor gone wild. "You said no lathe, no motor, no gas—"

"Right. But Brenner's an *electrical* engineer. Nowadays, with new cadmium batteries, you can fly a plane pretty well by electric motor. Remember, he didn't need more than a few hundred yards, and he probably left off any landing gear. Just over the fence, out into the dark, and then . . ." He paused for a moment, as if in doubt.

"And then?" the sergeant prompted eagerly.

"He could have had an accomplice, but I think not. These papers"—patting the dossier—"suggest he's always been a lone wolf. My guess is he just crashed the plane out there at some convenient spot. Is there any open ground, fairly isolated, around the plant?"

"Only to the East. Fifty acres of scrub-bush, gullies, and rattlesnakes—just the thing for a new housing development."

"Then look for traces there."

Black gaped at him.

"Look, sir, you know he couldn't possibly have carried in a model plane big enough to fly eight ounces over a thousand yards."

"Of course not," Middlebie sounded annoyed. "Obviously he built the plane at intervals in his office. He didn't need a lathe, since no gas engine was involved. All he wanted was a basic airframe, a light electric motor, and one or two good batteries of the new type the government first used—rechargeable. All such stuff a chief engineer could take without anybody paying attention. Maybe he used radio control, or maybe he didn't need to. Perhaps he knew from dry runs at home with a prototype how far it would fly on a given charge. With fifty acres to crash in, he didn't have to be perfect. Probably he turned the model loose just when the real one roared over, just in case some sharp-eared busybody heard the faint whirl of the props. It was such a good plan," Middlebie said, his enthusiasm growing, "that it ought to have succeeded."

"Who says it didn't? Even if you're right, there's nothing for the D. A. to take hold of. And I'm beginning to worry about you, Professor," the sergeant added

gravely. "Lately you seem more on the side of the criminal than the law—emotionally, I mean."

"I'm on the side of imagination and ingenuity," Middlebie retorted, his voice chilly. "As for evidence, search that field. If the plane crashed there, you may find some traces. Dig until you can at least get a warrant, then maybe something will turn up at Brenner's house. Maybe he was overconfident enough to save the prototype or some of the material he made it from. And run a bluff—you've done it before. Let him know you're on to him, and maybe he'll break."

"Naturally I'll do all that," Black said with dignity, and Middlebie grinned at him until he had to smile back.

"Mycroft couldn't do leg work, and neither can I," the old man said. "Don't think I like lying here; I'd rather be out at the bay watching the avocets."

"You'll be back there by the time I get my case against Brenner," Black assured him. And that's the way it was.



*I humbly bow to John Dryden for the following words of wisdom: "Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow; and he who would search for pearls must dive below."*



by Ed  
Lacy

At seven minutes past midnight the desk lieutenant rang and said, "Lew, I think this is a crackpot call. Something about seeing a murder but the guy sounds nuts to

me. See what you make of it."

"Okay, sir." Lew waited for the connecting click, then said, "Detective Moran speaking."

"Is this still the police station?" a man's small voice asked.

"This is the Detective Squad room. What's the trouble?"

"No trouble. My name is Howard Burton and I . . . eh . . . as I told the other officer, I want to report witnessing a murder."

"What's your address, Mr. Burton? I'll send a radio car over. Are you in any danger?"

"Me? Oh no, sir, no danger at all. And there's no need to rush. I'd come down to the police station myself but it's too bulky to carry."

"Bulky? Do you mean the body? Have you killed somebody?" Lew asked motioning for another detective to call a car from the garage.

"No, no, I merely happened to witness the killing. A man was knifed in the back. The . . ."

"Can you still see the killer?" Moran cut in.

"Sure. He's right in my living-room. I mean, I can see him here."

"What's your address, Mr. Burton? Where did this killing take place?"

"I live at 27 Moore Place. As for the murder, it took place about twelve hundred miles from here,

some two weeks ago. But I just saw it now."

"Burton, what the devil are you talking about?" Lew growled. "If this is a drunken joke or . . ."

"Officer, I'm quite sober and it isn't any joke. My wife and I returned from a cruise to Nassau about nine days ago and tonight we were out . . ."

"What about this killing?"

"That's what I'm trying to explain, officer. When we came home tonight we ran off some movies I took. In the pictures, near the docks, behind the Straw Market, well, it seems we unknowingly took a picture of a man being stabbed to death. My projector is too heavy to bring down to the police station but we thought we ought to report it."

"I'll be right over."

The Burtons lived in an old wooden house. Howard Burton was a thin man in his late fifties while his wife, Eunice, was a plump fifty. They both were upset. Howard said, "You see I used to own a small candy and newspaper store over on Twelfth Street. We sold it recently."

"Ran the store for nearly twenty-eight years," Eunice put in nervously. "Best years of our life went into the store."

"Yes," Howard said. "The point is, the entire block is being demol-

ished to build an apartment house project. We sold the store for a fair price and decided to take a vacation, the first we've ever had. We took one of these cruises. We were in Nassau for two days, returned the Saturday before last."

"It was lovely," Eunice added.

"I sent my movie films to be developed and we found them in the mailbox when we came home tonight. I was running them off and we saw . . . Well, look for your-

self, officer. Eunice please turn off the lights."

There was a new projector on a table in the center of the living-room, facing a small white screen on a stand. Moran saw pictures of a sleek liner as Howard said, "That's the boat. Now, I took these from the tender ferrying us ashore. There, that's the Straw Market, famous for its straw bags and hats. Now you see Eunice haggling with one of the native sellers over



SAY "CHEESE"

a hat. They expect you to haggle.”

“I bought quite a few hats,” Eunice said.

As Lew watched the sharp, clear, color pictures, Howard told him, “That’s the post office and . . .”

“No dear, that’s a hotel.”

“It doesn’t matter. On another roll I have shots of us at Paradise Beach. But watch this. Eunice had bought several hats and I thought it would be funny to take shots of her trying them on. There, you see her, with the docks in the background. Watch.”

Eunice’s smiling fat face was looking at them from the screen as she modeled several gay straw hats. Suddenly her face became a blur as it went out of focus and the tall grass in front of an empty dock came into sharp view. A grey-haired man, wearing a white linen suit and a straw hat, was walking along when a burly man with a dark skin, wearing ragged pants and shirt, ran out of the tall grass, plunged a knife into the other man’s back. As the man in the linen suit staggered, Eunice’s sweaty face came back into focus, giggling as she put on a cone-shaped hat several feet high.

Burton shut the projector and his wife snapped on the lights, both of them staring at the detective. Eunice said, “I have the hat here if you’d like to see it.”

Blinking at the light Lew said, “Let me see that knifing again.”

“Yes, sir.” Burton rerolled the film and when Eunice darkened the room again he started the projector, stopping the film as the ragged man stuck the knife into the other man’s back. It was difficult to make out either man’s features but the one in the linen suit seemed to be a white man and the other a native. Burton said, “I’m not too good with the camera. We bought it just before taking the cruise, and I must have accidentally zoomed in on the killing. That’s why Eunice is out of focus in the foreground. Now, when I run it . . . Okay to run it, officer?”

“Go ahead.”

“Now you see Eunice is back in focus and the dock area is just a white blur. I’ll finish the roll. That’s another shot of the boat as we were returning and here . . .”

“Turn on the lights, please,” Lew said.

“Roll will be finished in a second, officer. There’s Eunice sitting beside the ship’s swimming pool. That’s me, jumping into the pool, waving at the camera. And . . .” The screen turned a bright white and the reel was over. Snapping on the lights Eunice said, “I’m so plump, looks like the suit is ready to burst.”

Lew grinned politely. “Do you

know either of those two men?"

"No, sir," Howard said.

"Did you ever see them before?"

"Of course not," Eunice said.

"Soon as we saw the pictures I told Howard to phone the police. I mean, even though it happened outside the USA, we thought we should report it."

Lew asked, "After you took the pictures, before you got on the tender again, did you notice a crowd gather where the man was stabbed, any of the local police?"

"No, sir, I didn't." Howard looked at his wife. "You recall seeing any crowd, hon?"

Eunice shook her head. "If there had been a crowd we would have gone over to see what was going on. You know how nosy tourists are. Matter of fact, I remember after posing we started back toward the main street to buy some rum. From the liquor store we went to the tender. It was very hot. I was hungry and there was no sense eating ashore when we'd paid for the meals on the boat."

"That's right," Howard added. "Care for a drink, officer?"

Lew shook his head. "Did you pass the spot where the man was knifed when you returned to the tender?"

"I don't see how we could have. The tender was tied up at a dock on the other side of the Straw

Market. No, I'm sure we didn't."

"That's so," Eunice said. "I recall the first time we stepped off the tender, we walked right into the Straw Market."

"Was the man in the linen suit a passenger?" Lew asked.

"I don't think so," Howard told him. "Didn't hear anything about a passenger missing. As I told you, we never saw him before."

"Was there anything in the papers down there about a killing?"

Eunice giggled. "You don't go on a cruise to read papers. Besides, the ship left that same afternoon, a few hours after we took the pictures."

Lew took out his notebook. "Can you give me the exact date when this happened?"

The Burtons stared at each other. Mr. Burton said, "Let's see; we returned on Saturday, that was the Saturday before last, which would make it September 23rd, so. . . ."

"September 21st, dear."

"Anyway, we sailed from Nassau on Thursday. Wednesday we'd been out to Paradise Beach, left our shopping for the last day. Yes, this had to be on Thursday, September 19th, around noon, since we were going back to the ship for lunch."

"That's right," Eunice said. "The ship was sailing at four and I wanted to go ashore again, to buy a few more souvenirs. But Howie said we'd spent enough and, be-

sides, it was so hot I was tired. We remained on the ship, took a swim after lunch. Oh I remember *that* day very well. I won in the bingo game that night!"

Lew stood up. "I have a car outside, Mr. Burton. Can you take the film and the projector down to the squad room, run it off for us there?"

"Certainly, officer."

"I'm going to bed," Eunice said, adding with a giggle, "I do hope the other policemen won't laugh at me in my bathing suit."

At 8:30 a.m., Lt. Dave Wintino told Lew, "You might as well go on home. Downtown has been in touch with Nassau. An American, one Leonard Wyckoff, was found murdered there on the night of September 19th. Their coroner puts the time of death at about noon, so that checks. The Nassau police reported it to our officials there. Wyckoff was a retired man, quiet sort, kept to himself, been living in Nassau for the last five months. The killing was a sensation down there. Not only is homicide rare, but tourism is a major industry and this . . ."

Lew yawned.

"You're off-duty, go home. This isn't our baby. Mr. Burton has agreed to let us send his film to Nassau. That ends it."

"Maybe. One angle on this hit

me wrong. See what you think."

Lt. Wintino was a short man with wide shoulders which made him look even shorter. Hunching his shoulders now, in a mock gesture, he said, "Come on, Lew. We have a busy house here so don't play the all-seeing-TV-eye on a case in another country. But what's the wrong angle?"

"Just the way the Burtons kept saying murder, they seemed so sure the man was dead. Okay, it turned out that way but every knifing doesn't end in death, Dave."

Wintino shrugged again. "Look, if a layman sees a knife parked in somebody's back, what else would he think but it's a killing? Get some sleep, Lew. Let me be the eager-beaver of the squad."

Moran reached his apartment by 9:30 as his wife was making breakfast. Kissing him, she said, "What a novelty, I see my husband!"

"You know my shift of tours, Ruthie."

"You bet I know. You're coming home as I'm leaving for the office. If you get to sleep fast perhaps we can take in a movie tonight, before you return to that precinct house! Other wives can look forward to a Saturday night with their husbands, but if you're married to a cop you . . ."

"You expect him home when you see him," Lew said, kissing



her again. "I'll eat a light breakfast and try to hit the sack at once. We'll be able to have supper together and then take in a show."

At noon Ruth Moran shook her husband awake. "Squad room on the phone. Bad enough you have these crazy hours, but they don't even let you sleep. Sometimes I wish you'd never passed the exam!"

Lt. Wintino asked, "Lew? This is Dave. Sorry to get you up but something new has broken in that Nassau knifing. Turns out the deceased was a vault attendant in the bank on 141st Street and Broadway, in our squad area. He retired on a pension seven months ago."

"Lucky him," Lew said. "So what?"

"Exactly what I told Downtown but they seem to think it gives us an interest in the case. I have a squad car on the way to your place with the film, expense money, and a ticket on the 1:30 jet to the Bahamas, so pack a fast bag."

"Me? You're sending me?" Lew Moran asked, sleep vanishing from his voice.

"Sure. It's your case and you deserve an easy assignment for a change. Take your swim trunks along. If you want to relax for a day down there, okay, but I expect you back within four days. Understand?"

"Yes, sir! And thanks, Dave. Oh, one thing, while I'm gone check out the Burtons for me."

"Will do. Now stop yaking and get dressed."

As he jumped out of bed, Ruth asked, "Will you be back in time for supper; can we still take in the movie, Lew?"

Stopping to give his wife a fast kiss as he raced for the bathroom, Lew said, "Hon, I won't be back for a few days."

"Oh for ...! Another lost weekend for us. Really, Lew, this is too much. Where are you going?"

"Nassau," Lew called over the sound of the shower.

"Nassau? Out in Long Island?" Ruthie asked loudly.

"No, Nassau in the Bahamas!"

"You're going to the West Indies? Why you-you big bum! Can I go along?" she shouted, almost screamed.

Wiping the perspiration from his face Lew stared at Detective Inspector Davis-Johns, the dark brown face in sharp contrast to the snappy white uniform, including the tightly buttoned, stiff collar, and Lew wondered how the man could look so cool in the tropical heat. They were standing in an empty lot not far from the Straw Market (which hadn't impressed Lew much, although he bought a

few items to bring home to Ruthie). An empty dock stood in the background. Pointing to the spot where Wyckoff's body had been found in the tall grass, Davis-Johns said with his very clipped, British accent, "The body of the deceased lay here for over five hours, hidden by the high grass. Now, assuming the man taking the pictures of his wife was about over there, roughly two hundred yards, the question in my mind is this: if his camera saw the blooming stabbing, why wouldn't the man have seen it?"

Lew touched the cheap motion picture camera he'd purchased on the way to the plane, now hanging from his neck. "For one thing, on a bright, sunny day, it's pretty hard to see anything two blocks away. Secondly, I've been fooling with this camera a bit and if I'm looking through the range-finder, or whatever they call this thing, all my attention would be on the person I was photographing. The knifing probably happened so fast, a thrust in the back and the killer ran, that Burton wouldn't notice it. I understand robbery was the motive, sir?"

Davis-Johns shook his dark head. "In light of the film I've seen, I now doubt that. It is not in the criminal pattern of our island. True, we have petty thefts and some bashings, but never an unpro-

voked stabbing as a robbery pattern. Mr. Wyckoff was an elderly man, could have been easily overpowered. Also, while his wallet was taken, his watch and ring were not touched. At first, I thought this was because the killer had been bloody well rushed, but the film shows no one around him. Your Mr. Burton claims he saw no one, so if theft was the motive, why didn't the robber crouch in the high grass and weeds beside his victim, and take the ring and watch?"

Lew shrugged. "Any prints on the murder weapon?"

"None, a cheap knife of German make, a type sold the world over. Detective Moran, it is my belief the solution to this crime will be found in the victim's past."

"Mind if I take a few pictures of you, sir?" Lew asked. "Since I have the camera handy."

Lew focused on Davis-Johns who looked a bit annoyed, but struck a pose. Lew wondered if the inspector was trying to put the blame for the murder on an outsider for the sake of the tourist business. He asked, "You mean a hired killer, sir?"

"Exactly, sir. Perhaps a killer expressly sent from the United States to . . ."

"Sir, this is a movie camera, so wave your hands or walk about."

"Blast your camera! This isn't a bloody cinema studio; we're here to solve a murder!" Davis-Johns exploded.

"Yes, sir," Lew said quietly, taking pictures of the angry officer. "Do you know anything about Mr. Wyckoff's past?"

"Indeed not. He was a retired chap, in all ways, I am told. A timid-like man whom one would never associate with a crime, which is exactly why his murder arouses suspicion of an outside killer in my mind. Mr. Wyckoff was rather good with silver, wanted to open a shop here to manufacture souvenirs. Of course, in our poor country for a non-citizen to go into business, well, I'm afraid the venture was bogged down in red-tape. Would you care to see some of Wyckoff's silver work? He was really quite an artist."

"I would," Lew said, putting his camera away. "And I'd also like a tall drink in the shade, if possible."

Davis-Johns smiled at him. "Very possible. Your face is lobster-red. You Americans burn easily; don't drink enough tea, you know."

Three days later Lew ran off his reel of film in the squad room, using Burton's projector. When he finished and had turned on the lights, Lt. Wintino asked, "Okay, Lew, I rushed to have your film

developed and what does it prove, except you cut off hands and heads, jerked from one subject to another? Plus that, Davis-Johns isn't much of an actor. You sure got a nice tan down there."

"It proves I'm a lousy movie photographer," Lew said. "But it also proves Howard Burton has a very expensive camera and is a damn good photographer, although he claims he only purchased the camera shortly before they took the cruise."

"Still on the Burtons, Lew? They're a tired, middle-aged couple, not killers."

"Maybe, but Dave, the quiet of a jet is a great place for thinking about a case. Wyckoff also was a tired, middle-aged joker. In fact, he and the Burtons have that in common. Now, isn't it a fat coincidence that the only slip Burton makes in his reel, his only mistake, he manages to zoom in on a man being stabbed? Not even a professional photographer could be that lucky! Also, Burton doesn't say he saw a man being hurt, but that the man was *murdered*."

Dave shook his head. "Too much sun has melted your one-track-brains. Lew, if Burton was involved in this, why would he start an investigation by showing us the movies in the first place?"

"I gave that a lot of thought, too.

Dave, there's a brace of reasons why he showed us the film. First, he's an amateur killer, thinks he's pulled the perfect crime, and like all perfect crime nuts, he gets a charge out of rubbing our noses in his alleged cleverness. But . . ."

"Come on, even a nut doesn't take pictures of his crime."

"On the contrary, Dave. Burton thinks the movies not only give him and his wife an alibi, but he's so smart *he's showing us the actual murderer!*"

"Now Mrs. Burton is in on the killing, too?"

"I think so. But the film isn't an alibi. I took that shot of myself on the beach by starting the camera, then stretching out on the sand. Simple enough to do with these automatic, battery-driven cameras. According to the Nassau police, Wyckoff always took a pre-lunch stroll along the docks, which were near his rooming house. See the picture? Assuming the Burtons came to Nassau to kill him—and it's another coincidence they went to Nassau, not to San Juan, or one of the other islands—they had two days to learn of his walking habits."

"Come on, Lew, thousands of tourists go to Nassau. Don't forget that in Burton's films the killer is obviously a heavysset, dark-skinned man."

Lew nodded. "I considered that, but a single can of make-up turns a white skin brown. Dave, suppose Burton came ashore with some ragged clothes and make-up, plus padding—stuff he'd brought from the States? Be a cinch to take it ashore in one of the straw baskets they'd bought the day before. Knowing where Wyckoff takes his usual walk, he sets up the camera and then changes into his disguise in the tall grass.

"Now, when we see the killing, his wife is out of focus. All we see is the blur of her cone-shaped straw hat, so they could have put the hat on a stick in front of the camera. Then she took over, zoomed in on Burton doing the killing. He changes back to his slacks and sport shirt, wipes off the make-up with a sponge, shoves everything into a straw basket and returns to finish taking pictures of her. Later, at sea, they throw the rags overboard."

"Lew, you're the one going overboard. You saw the reports on the Burtons, a couple of small-time store keepers. What possible motive connects the Burtons and Wyckoff?"

Lew pointed to a silver pin of intricate design on the table. "This could be the connection."

Wintino looked blank.

"Dave, let's go over what we

know about Wyckoff. He's a guy who put in thirty years as a bank vault attendant, finally retires on a small pension. Three years ago his wife died after a long illness, probably using up every cent they had. Wyckoff's silver-work hobby had to be something he's been doing for years. Okay, his retirement is coming up in a year or so and he's broke, but dreams of retiring to the West Indies, also a dream of long standing. He needs a few grand to set himself up so he'll be able to live on his pension. Now, and this is pure guess work on my part," Lew added, fingering the silver pin, "but if . . ."

"I'm glad you admit it's only a guess, Holmes. That jet flight went to your head like booze."

"Just listen, first, Dave. If I want to rent a safety deposit box I fill out a signature card, pay for the box and the attendant gives me two keys to the box. Right?"

"I never had anything to stash away in a vault box, but that's the procedure. What's it add up to, Perry Mason?"

"It adds to this: a guy like Wyckoff, an expert with metals, has those two keys around his desk until the box is rented. Now, when I wish to open my box I hand him my key and he inserts it, then uses the bank's master key. The supposed safety measure is that two different

keys are needed to open the box. Okay, Wyckoff is about to retire and broke. Now, let's say he has sets of keys for, say, twenty empty boxes waiting to be rented. It would be simple for him to make a duplicate key for each of these boxes. Now let's suppose I rent a box. Wyckoff is down in the vault, alone most of the time. Using the duplicate he's already made of my keys, plus his regular bank key, he can open my box and examine the contents at his leisure. No chance of his being caught, as he has to come out of the vault and unlock the gate before anybody can enter."

"You mean he's looking for somebody stashing away money to escape taxes?" Wintino asked.

"Right. Suppose I have ten grand in my box, he can be fairly sure it's shady money of some kind, and if he takes a grand or two, I'm in no position to raise a fuss."

Wintino threw up his hands. "That's a far-out theory, and there's still no connection. The Burtons ran a hand-to-mouth candy store. Also, we've checked the list of vault box owners; no Burton."

Lew rubbed his sun-tanned chin. "I've done a little checking on my own, with a few stoolies. True, the Burtons' store wasn't much but, like many candy-newspaper shops, it was used as a numbers drop. Nothing big time, Dave, but two

grand a year from the numbers is peanuts, so let's say over the years, being thrifty folks, the Burtons managed to put away \$20,000. My idea is Wyckoff helped himself to a grand or two, then went to Nassau. He learned that he needed \$4,000 to open his shop down there. The deal got snarled in red-tape but Wyckoff always said he could raise the money. Again, as a pure guess, he wrote the Burtons for money. He claimed it would be his first and only bite, but if he didn't get it he'd tell the tax boys about their dough and collect the reward there. The . . ."

"Lew, you're running off at the mouth like a TV badge, making a lot of wild deductions. Doesn't give us any basis of fact on which to move."

"I think we have a move, Dave, and a simple one which will tell us if I'm right or cockeyed. Let's think about the Burtons, a hard-working couple, with their little kitty from the numbers stashed away. Their problem is they can't spend it without attracting the attention of the tax boys. If they bought a new house, or an expensive car, for example, they'd have a lot of explaining to do. Okay, Wyckoff has helped himself to a grand or two and there's nothing they can do about it. They might not even be sure it was his hand in their vault

box, although they must have suspected him. Suddenly the dawn breaks for the Burtons. This housing project is going up, they *have* to sell their store. This is their chance to live it up a little, supposedly using the money from the sale of the shop. Then Wyckoff writes asking for a few grand and they figure they'll be blackmailed for the rest of their lives. They decide to kill him. There are two things you can do about a shake-down: either blow the whistle or kill, if you don't want to pay. That's motive enough for me, sir."

"Lew, while I appreciate your devoting so much thought and time to the case, so far your theory is all supposition and could result in a fat suit for false arrest. Also, you keep overlooking the hard fact that the Burtons never had a box in the bank!"

"They could have rented a box under a phony name or in Mrs. Burton's maiden name. It would mean our checking every box holder, especially any who cancelled their boxes a few months before Wyckoff retired. Lot of work, but sir, I have this quickie idea which will test my theory in minutes. There hasn't been anything in the local papers about this, but have you told the Burtons that we know the name of the deceased?"

"No."

"Great. We phone them and say this is Jack Wyckoff, Leonard's brother, that we have a letter they'd be interested in, and to meet us at once on some street corner. It's that simple. If they show, we're in, on the right track, and can probably secure a confession from the Burtons while we take our time checking the names of the vault box renters. If they don't show, it means they never heard of Wyckoff and my theory is a zero. Is it worth a phone call, Dave?"

Lt. Wintino smiled. "I'll invest a dime to prove how wrong you are."

Dave phoned from a corner booth near the Burton house. He said quickly, "This is Leonard Wyckoff's brother. I found a letter from him you'll be interested in buying. I'm on the corner of Grand Avenue and 143rd Street. If you're not here within fifteen minutes the letter goes to the tax people," and hung up.

Wintino and Moran were waiting in a car outside the Burton house when Howard and Eunice

came rushing out minutes later. On frisking them, they found a gun in Howard's pocket. All the way to the precinct house Eunice screamed hysterically at her husband, "I told you to pay him off! I told you! I told you what's five thousand! But you never did listen to me! You and your great brain, your stupid ideas!"

Later, over containers of coffee in the squad room, Dave said, "Well, this case is all wrapped up in record time. Real smart arm-chair brain work on your part, Lew, and I almost booted it. I'm recommending you for a promotion to. . . ."

"Dave, that can wait. I mean, thank you, but first can you do me a big favor? Advance my vacation so I can take it next week, sir?"

"Sure, I think it can be arranged. But why the rush? You just returned from a kind of vacation."

"That's exactly why. If I don't take my wife to Nassau, there will be no living with her! Every time she looks at my sun-tan, she sees red."



Today the TV medium is often credited with stimulating the younger generation with ideas, especially with the innocuous ones. But some of us "oldies" will recall when the Katzenjammer Kids were given that questionable recognition.



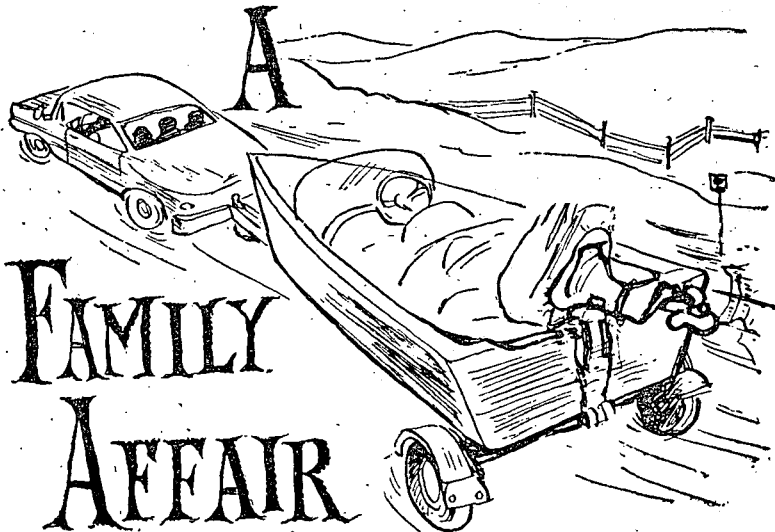
**H**OT mirages shimmered wetly far down the gleaming pavement of the interstate highway. Hot air blasted in the open windows of the car. But neither the heat nor the condition of the road occupied Tom Carlton as he sat with moist-palmed hands clutching the wheel.

It was the man in the back seat, the stranger sitting close beside his daughter with one arm about her slim waist, the other hand grip-

ping the haft of a knife—that was the reality overpowering Carlton's consciousness.

In the rear view mirror he could see the blade touching against the bright fabric of her dress. *This can't be happening*, he told himself incredulously. *It can't!* He glanced at his wife who was sitting stiffly, terrified, and he had to add, *But it is!*

The interstate had been a wel-





come change after some of the by-ways on which the Carltons' vacation had taken them. So welcome, in fact, they had hardly noticed the time, and it was almost three o'clock when Sally touched her husband's arm. "Tom, isn't that one of those roadside park signs ahead? Let's stop and eat."

The small square sign rapidly grew legible as they bore down on it. From the back seat Melinda read it aloud, "\$200 Fine for Throwing Litter on Highway."

"Golly, Pop," Tommy piped up, "I'm starving! Can't we stop?"

"You're always starving," said Melinda, with the disdain of a sixteen year old for one four years her junior—especially a brother. "In fact, little one, you're always griping about something."

"Yeah? Yeah? Look who's talking."

"Knock it off, you two," Carlton snapped.

Sally turned. "Read the funnies, Tommy. Leave your sister alone."

"I didn't start it. You're always taking up for her like she's a queen or something."



Carlton's knuckles whitened on the wheel. "Knock it off!"

Tommy frowned darkly at his sister, then rattled through the Sunday paper on the floor, slipped out the comic sheets, and put his foot back on the paper to keep it from the wind.

Melinda pointed ahead. "There's the sign, Dad. Roadside tables, one mile."

"Good," Carlton sighed. "I'm with Tommy. Hungry as a bear."

They pulled off onto a curving drive that led through a grove of trees. A tractor-trailer and small sports car were just moving back onto the highway at the other side of the park. Carlton passed a station wagon into which a half dozen people were crowding, then eased into the shade of a tree at the very back of the park and stopped.

He pushed his glasses up to his forehead and rubbed his eyes. "Get the lunch basket out of the boat, Tommy."

But the boy was now absorbed in the comics. "Just a second, Dad."

Hot, tired, Carlton snapped, "Don't just a second me!"

Smiling, Melinda patted her father's cheek. "I'll get it."

As she walked briskly back toward the boat and trailer, Carlton watched her, finding it again almost impossible to believe that this

girl with the shape and smile of a woman was really his daughter. It seemed such a painfully short time ago that she was all bony knees and elbows and teeth braces.

He grinned to himself and closed his eyes again. *A sure sign of age, old buddy.*

The station wagon, the only other vehicle in the park, moved past them. A small boy leaned from a window and stuck out his tongue. Carlton watched absently as the car paused at the highway, then turned and began to pick up speed.

Sally said, "You wanted to check the boat, didn't you, honey?"

He nodded. "Right. You womenfolk get the chow ready."

Sally seemed about to say something else, but it was at that instant that Melinda screamed . . .

That had been little more than ten minutes ago. No warning. Nothing. All of them—Carlton, Sally, Tommy—had leaped from the car. They had seen the man holding Melinda roughly against him. He was young, maybe twenty-five, dirty, unshaven, and only slightly taller than the girl. As he glared back at them he held a knife against Melinda's throat.

"I been waiting . . ." he said nervously. "I been waiting a long time for just one car to be in here. Now then, mister, everybody back

inside and let's roll. Move! *Pronto!*"

Melinda, her blue eyes wide with unspeakable terror, cried out, "Daddy . . ."

Carlton took a step toward his daughter, but the stranger brandished his knife wildly. "I'll kill her, mister. If you try anything, I'll kill her! Now, get back in the car. *Move!*"

The appetites of a few moments before had vanished. The stranger—in the back seat with Tommy on his left and Melinda on his right—was the only one who ate. He wolfed a sandwich, keeping the knife pressed against the girl's ribs.

Tommy was the first to speak. "Mister . . . you're that fella the police are looking for, aren't you? You're . . . Joe Whitlock."

The man paused and looked suspiciously at the boy, then at the folded newspaper beneath Tommy's feet. "You seen it in the paper, huh?" He tore at the sandwich with his teeth. "What'd they say about me, sonny?"

The boy's lower lip trembled and his eyes flicked to his sister. "They said you broke out of prison—that you killed some people."

"And I'll kill some more if I have to. What else they say?"

"That you were . . . real dangerous . . ." The boy cleared his throat and his voice grew firmer. "Mr. Whitlock . . . would you hold that

knife against me instead of Melinda? She's just a girl, and girls get scared easy."

Whitlock grinned, wiping his mouth on the back of one hand. "There ain't such a thing as 'just a girl'." He turned and looked intently at Melinda. "Not when you been in stir long as I have."

The rear view mirror showed only the trailing boat, so Carlton had casually shifted it to view the back seat. Now, seeing the way Whitlock was looking at his daughter, a wintry chill stabbed through him.

If only to get the man's attention off the girl, Carlton said, "What do you want from us? We don't have much cash, but take what we have. Take the car, put us out on a back road someplace—"

"Mister, keep your mouth shut and drive. I need you people. I need all of you . . ." His eyes again went to the terrified girl at his side. ". . . for now."

Carlton could feel Sally's pleading thoughts. *Do something! For God's sake, help my baby!*

As the car rounded a long sweeping curve, they all saw it at once. A black and white sedan was parked at right angles to the highway beside an exit ramp, the state's emblem blazoned on the door.

Whitlock snapped forward, forcing Melinda with him. He moved

the knife to the side of her neck so that Carlton could see it clearly in the mirror. His voice was as tight as a guy wire. "No funny stuff! I don't want that cop giving us a second look. We're just one big happy family."

Carlton was like a drowning man, ready to grasp at a straw. Slam on the brake . . . ? Hope to disarm him, or at least hold him until the trooper could, perhaps, get to them . . . ?

"She's your kid, mister," the voice rasped in his ear.

The speedometer held on a steady sixty. There was only the noisy rush of wind to be heard. In the mirror Carlton could see the knife, held lower now, invisible outside the car. Whitlock's eyes, as if held by magnetic force, fastened on the police car. They came abreast. There was a brief glimpse of the lone cop sitting at the wheel, mopping with a handkerchief at his forehead beneath a thatch of flaming red hair.

Then they were past, the boat blotting out the view behind, and the chance—if chance it had been—was gone.

"We're low on gas," Carlton told him. It was almost four o'clock. "Sign back there said there's a station at the next exit."

Whitlock leaned forward and

looked at the gauge. "Okay. But everybody stays in the car, understand?"

The car and trailer rode the cloverleaf and came to a halt beside the pumps of a spacious service station.

"Fill her up?" the attendant asked.

Carlton nodded. He had to get a message to this man. The only chance would come when he signed the credit ticket.

While the automatic device nozzled gasoline into the tank, the attendant busied himself with the routine of checking the water, oil, cleaning the windshield. Carlton, his mind churning, watched the acts which usually seemed to transpire with such deliberate slowness, and which now were done all too quickly. The credit card was handed out, the ticket made in the little machine, the clipboard passed across the sill.

"Anything else, sir?"

"No." The ballpoint pen was in his hand. *No name*, he told himself. *A message . . . short . . . to the point, and hope he catches on . . .*

But as the pen touched the card, Joe Whitlock—looking over his shoulder—said, "Just sign on the dotted line, mister. While I'm watching."

It was almost dark as they neared the state line. It was the

night that held terror for Carlton. Night, and the way the man kept his eyes on Melinda. It would have been better if he hadn't mentioned the gas, if he had let the tank run dry.

"Hey!" Whitlock said suddenly. "What's that?"

A large sign loomed on the roadside, apparently a temporary one: All Vehicles Stop at State Line for Agriculture Department Inspection.

"Do you want me to stop?" asked Carlton.

"Hell, yes, you stop! I don't want anybody chasing us!"

As they pulled off the highway before a small building at the state border, a uniformed man walked back after waving the preceding car on.

"What's this all about?" Whitlock demanded.

The man looked inside. "You folks ain't heard? Japanese beetle epidemic. Gotta be sure you ain't bringing 'em in." The man focused his attention on Tommy. "Usually, it's the kids that bring 'em. Hop out, sonny."

"But—" the startled boy began.

"Just take a second, son." The man opened the door on Tommy's side.

"Make it quick, buddy," Whitlock said testily.

"That I will . . ." It happened so

fast that none of them knew what was going on until it was over. The man let Tommy out, then suddenly he leaped inside the car and tore Whitlock's knife away from him. Then he had the escapee out of the car and lying flat on the pavement.

"That's it, folks," he said. "It's all over now."

Highway patrol cars of both states seemed to come from everywhere. From the one that stopped just behind the Carlton's boat, a big red-headed trooper climbed out.

They all recognized him as the cop they'd seen hours before. "What . . . ?" Carlton started. "How did you . . . ?"

The big fellow grinned. "After you people passed me I cranked up, all set to throw the book at you. But when I got on your tail, I got to wondering. I've been patrolling highways a long time, but I never seen anything like that. You didn't drive like you was either crazy or drunk, so I radioed in to headquarters. The sergeant said to keep on your tail. Well, after you stopped at that gas station we talked to the boy that waited on you, and we

figured the man in the car was Whitlock, so . . ." He waved his hand around. "We set this up. Best thing we could come up with."

Carlton broke in, baffled. "You never saw anything like what?"

The trooper looked from Carlton to Sally. "No . . . I reckon it wasn't you." He clapped a ham-like hand on Tommy's shoulder. "It figures. It was a boy's stunt.

You see, there I was in plain sight, and I asked myself, 'O'Hara,' I says, 'with a sign every few miles telling 'em it'd cost \$200, why the devil would anybody toss the whole bloody Sunday paper out the window right in front of a cop!'"

Carlton stared at his son. How . . . with Whitlock sitting right beside him? And then he thought back. Windows were open, the noise of the wind, Whitlock's gaze intent on the police car. The boy simply slipped the paper over the sill and no one had seen it because of the boat behind the car. . . .

Melinda wasn't the only one growing up. Tommy suddenly seemed a great deal older. That is, until he grinned up at the big cop and said, "Boy, I'll bet it sure made some mess, huh?"



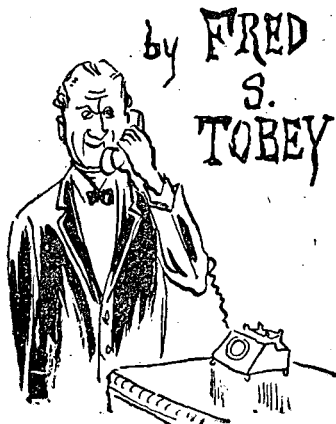
*Strange, isn't it, how one may seek to dispel ill-natured gossip by any means, until fear of disclosure tightens its grasping fingers? Then, suddenly, "... the road lies straight and dusty to the grave."*

"**T**HE superintendent of the county hospital down in Dover is calling you," said the district attorney's secretary. "I tried to take the message but he won't talk to anyone else."

Bartlett picked up his phone and spoke a grudging hello. A carefully paced voice answered.

"Mr. Bartlett, this is Samuel Hawes at the county hospital. We have a situation here that—well, I wonder if you could come down?"

"Dr. Hawes, I don't mean to put you off, but this is a bad morning. I'm getting a case ready for trial. Are you sure it isn't something the



local police can handle capably?"

There was a brief pause.

"I wonder if you wouldn't rather come down," said Dr. Hawes with mild insistence. "This matter could generate some rather sensational publicity with political implications. We are a county hospital, of course, and with the election coming up—"

"I'll be there in thirty minutes," said Bartlett. He tossed the brief he had been studying into a basket and rose from his chair while he was still talking.

The county hospital was housed in a modern brick building, high on a hill overlooking the small town of Dover. From Dr. Hawes' office a picture window afforded a breath-taking view of the fertile river valley where the village nestled, and the foothills of a moun-

tain range beyond. The district attorney could not help pausing to admire the panorama as he entered the office.

"Yes," said Dr. Hawes, "I, too, find that sight a pleasant one. In the old hospital, if you recall, I was in a sort of dungeon. I have never ceased to feel grateful for the work you and the committee did to make the funds available for this building."

"Well, the old hospital was a fire-trap," said Bartlett. "Besides, we got a lot of help from you and your friends in the last election."

"It's good of you to remember that," said Dr. Hawes, "because I should hate to have to leave here."

"Leave?" said Bartlett, surprised. "Are you thinking of it?"

"I'm not thinking of it at all. But if there is any substance in what I heard yesterday I suppose I might be asked to resign, or at best to retire."

"Is it really that serious?"

"I don't know yet. Please sit down, and I'll tell you about it."

They moved their chairs so that both could look out the picture window.

"You know what euthanasia is, Mr. Bartlett?"

"Euthanasia? Planned death for the incurably ill, isn't that right? We had a doctor upstate, some time back, that lost his license to



practise because of that. Recall?"

"Yes. Quite a few cases have come to light over the years. I think you can see that a doctor might wonder, sometimes, how far he should try to prolong the life of a patient who was clearly beyond recovery, and perhaps in deep suffering. But ethically he hasn't any choice. It's his duty to keep the patient alive if he can."

"And you suspect one of your doctors of practising euthanasia, is that it?"

"There's more to it than that. What I've been told is that this doctor had some sort of arrangement with an undertaker."

"An undertaker!" Bartlett passed a hand across his forehead. "Holy smoke!" he said. "I can see what you mean by publicity and political implications."

"Yes, but I don't really have much information to go on. The first I heard of this was yesterday morning. We have a very elderly patient here, Charles Richards, who sent word by one of the nurses that he wanted to see me privately. Wouldn't talk to anyone else so I went in to see him. Richards is very near the end but he seemed quite lucid and said he wanted to tell me something in confidence, something old Jud Billings, the undertaker, confided to him before he died.

"Billings and Richards shared a semi-private room for a while, up to the time Billings died, about a week ago. Billings was in his late seventies himself, and he had a heart condition. I don't know how much you know about this town, but Billings had been the local undertaker here for as long as I can remember, and I'm almost seventy. It was a small business but a very old one, going back to his father, I think. Very highly regarded.

"Well, the night before Billings died he did some talking, Richards says. Told Richards in confidence that he believed his doctor, Dr. Poirier, might do him in. Richards thought he was out of his head, but Billings went on with quite a story, said Dr. Poirier had been sending him 'cases', as he called them, whenever his undertaking business was in a slump.

"'You watch out or he'll get you, too,' Billings said, according to Richards. Poirier is Richards' doctor too. As a matter of fact, I guess his patients include most of the old people in this vicinity. He's a remarkable man, in his eighties himself. A lot of the older people were his patients when they were children. Dr. Poirier has always been a very popular doctor. And quite ethical, I've always thought."

"Then surely," said Bartlett, "you don't believe any nonsense



about sending 'cases' to Billings to help his undertaking business? Don't you think it's likely that story originated in Richards' senile brain? Or was some feverish fancy of Billings?"

"Oh, of course, I simply couldn't take it seriously. But to calm Richards I told him I would see Dr. Poirier right away, and I made Richards promise to keep the matter a secret until I saw him again. As a matter of fact I did try to see Dr. Poirier immediately, to warn him of what Richards had said, and get his help in quieting the old man down. But when I called Dr. Poirier at his house and asked him to stop in here—told him it was urgent—he didn't show up. I called him again a couple of hours later and he hung up the phone. Around noon I went down to his house but he didn't answer the doorbell, though I could hear him moving around inside.

"Well, I began to wonder what *was* going on, and I went to see the manager at the bank, who is a good friend of mine, and made some inquiries about Jud Billings and his undertaking business. It turns out that Billings had an extraordinary number of funerals the last year or so, and before he died the Morticians League started looking into Billings because he had cut all his funeral rates to

something like half price, and they were pretty upset about it. They dropped it, of course, when Billings died, because his business was pretty much a one-man affair.

"Well, this morning I called Dr. Poirier again, but there wasn't any answer. That was when I called you. If you go down with me, Dr. Poirier can hardly refuse to talk to us. It seems to me this is the kind of thing we've got to choke off right at the outset, before old Charles Richards gets talking with someone else. With the state campaign just starting, our enemies would have this all over the front pages in no time. And it does come back on me personally, because, after all, I *am* responsible for what goes on here at the hospital, even though—"

"You're right," Bartlett interrupted, getting to his feet. "This could be a bombshell. Let's go and see if Dr. Poirier is in."

If Dr. Poirier was in, he was being very quiet, and he was still not answering his doorbell.

"He must be in," said Dr. Hawes. "His car is here. Maybe he's taking a nap." He tried the door and, finding it unlocked pushed it open. "There he is," he said. "He *is* taking a nap."

Through the open door of his office they could see the doctor stretched out on a couch. They

stepped into the quiescent house.

"Wake up, will you, John?" said Dr. Hawes. "I've brought District Attorney Bartlett with me."

But Dr. Poirier did not wake up.

Dr. Hawes strode to the couch and picked up Dr. Poirier's wrist. "He's dead!"

Bartlett pointed to an envelope on a table at the head of the couch. "That has your name on it," he said.

Dr. Hawes picked up the envelope and tore it open. There were several typed sheets inside. A few errors had been crossed out and corrected, but there were many others that the old doctor had just not bothered about.

"To Dr. Samuel Hawes, County Hospital," Dr. Hawes read aloud. "Dear Sam, I'm writing this to let you and my other friends know about something I did, so there will not be any doubts in anybody's mind. I have been worrying about this since you phoned me this morning, and I think it is best to put it all down on paper, because I am not sure I am going to last through another morning, the way my heart is acting. I can't say I blame the old ticker, it has done quite a job for me the last eighty-four years."

Bartlett interrupted. "Any chance of reviving him?" he asked.

Dr. Hawes raised the old physi-

cian's arm again. It was noticeably stiff. "I'd say any hope for that expired several hours ago."

"Then we might as well read the rest of what he has to say."

The situation I want to tell you about (Dr. Poirier's letter continued) started one night about a year ago, while I was playing rummy with Jud Billings. Jud and I have been friends since we were small boys, as you know. Jud wanted to be a doctor, but he didn't quite make it, and he ended up undertaking. I believe he always thought of it as a sort of extension of the doctor's work, in a way.

The night I'm speaking about, Jud was feeling quite upset about something he'd been reading in a magazine. This writer, he said, was claiming that undertakers were a bunch of racketeers, getting rich off the sorrow and sadness of the deceased's relatives and charging ten times as much for a funeral as the casket cost them, when an ordinary businessman would not get away with charging a quarter as much for his services.

"Well, Jud," I said, "you charge about a thousand dollars for a funeral, don't you? How much do you pay for the casket?"

"Look here, Doc," said Jud, getting kind of hot under the collar, "are you taking the side of this feller in the magazine? Maybe it

only costs me about a hundred and fifty dollars for a casket, but what about the slumber room, and the place to entertain in, and the casket coach with attendants all properly dressed up? What about all those things that people are bound and determined to have these days? Why, some families will go over to the city and pay an extra three or four hundred dollars more than I would charge them here, just because I play my music on an amplifier and don't have a real electric pipe organ."

"That may be so, Jud," I said, "but just the same, some families really don't have that much money to spend for a funeral. I don't like to see them having to scrape and scrimp for months afterward, the way they do sometimes."

That was when Jud broke down and made an admission.

"Doc," he said, "I'll grant you the charge for the funeral seems pretty high; and maybe it seems as if I ought to be asking a lot less when you look at what goes into it, but how is an undertaker like me going to stay in business unless he can average out with enough at the end of the month? Why, last week I could have had four funerals in one afternoon, but I could only handle one, so the other three went to the city. Now this week I haven't got any. Can I run a special

when things are slow? Can I call up an elderly friend and say, 'Bill, if you'd care to throw in the towel along about Thursday I could give you half off the usual price?' No, I have to sit and wait, the same as you have to wait for somebody to get sick. At that, you can depend on a patient needing you about every so often, but he is going to need me only once."

I could see that Jud had his problems, and besides, I have never been much for telling people how they ought to run their personal affairs. When I was a boy, a funeral was mighty simple and not very costly. But then, when I was a boy they would put you in jail for driving more than twenty-five miles an hour, and the other day I was on a road where the sign said it was against the law to go *less* than forty. Times do change, and you've got to bow to the new customs. If people want fancy funerals, I guess they ought to be allowed to pay for them, if they can.

About a week or so after I had that conversation with Jud, a patient of mine died, an elderly woman. The family was in poor circumstances but they had a great deal of pride and I knew they were planning to go to the city for an undertaker to make sure their aunt got the best. I remembered what Jud had said and I called him up

and inquired casually how things were going with him that week.

"Terrible," said Jud. "I'm just sitting here."

"Jud," I said, "if I could drop a case in your lap right this minute would you take it for half price?"

Jud hemmed and hawed about ethics for a while, but finally he said he would. I gave the news to the family and when they realized Jud was prepared to give them all the extras and charge only half his usual price, they were very glad to let him have the funeral.

It worked out so well for everybody that a little while later, when I had a death in similar circumstances, I called Jud again and it turned out he wasn't busy, so he took this funeral for half price, too.

I suppose there would have been no great harm if that's where it had stopped, but it didn't. One night when I was again playing rummy with Jud Billings and he was grumbling about how slow things had been, I recalled an elderly and complaining patient that I had been striving to keep going for some months, though he had long since ceased to appreciate the favor. I mentioned this patient to Jud and said that was a case I guessed everybody would be grateful to see him have soon, most especially the patient himself. This led to some talk about the new drugs, and the

way they have increased the life span.

When I was a young doctor, it just seemed as if there were some natural force that took the decision out of the doctor's hands when the patient got to the point where he wasn't any good to anybody, including himself. I remember saying to Jud that I wondered if I weren't presuming on a higher function just as much by keeping someone going after he got to the state of a vegetable, as I would by helping him over the edge.

Well, it just happened this particular patient chose the next day to go to his rest, despite everything the drug companies and I could do, and without thinking anything about the conversation Jud and I had had the night before, I called Jud and asked him if he would like to take the funeral at half price, because this family certainly could use the discount. Jud did, and I hadn't any idea he thought this one was any different than the others.

If Jud got the mistaken notion that I made a little adjustment in the time schedule of this case, maybe that put the suspicion in his head that I adjusted some other cases. I don't know. The fact is, I'm an old man and a lot of my patients grew up with me, and they're about my age or not much

younger. They've been thinning out pretty fast the last few years, and it didn't take any adjusting to refer a case to Jud once in a while when he wasn't busy.

But now, Sam, I'm coming to the part where you can clearly see the mistake of thinking this kind of thing could ever work out. Jud decided he ought to make the half price his regular rate if the business was going to continue this way, especially since he was getting complaints from people who were called on to pay the higher figure, so he let the word about the new prices get around quite generally. That brought more business and I could see that Jud was starting to get nervous and edgy, with all the work he was trying to handle at his advanced age.

I got so worried about Jud's health that I stopped referring cases to him, but the mischief was already afoot. Pretty soon, instead of the local business going to the city the way a lot of it used to, the city business began coming here to Jud instead. Jud simply wasn't able to keep up with it. The Morticians League that got after him about his prices didn't help any, either. His heart wasn't too good, and it gave out on him from the extra effort, and the worry.

I never did realize until today that Jud ever thought I made any

adjustments in the timing of those cases. This morning I was calling on Charlie Richards, an elderly patient at the hospital who had half of Jud's room while he was there, and Charlie said Jud had told him about some suspicions he had. Charlie said he was going to call you in privately, Sam, and tell you what Jud said, and he just wanted to know that he was "onto me" and I had better watch my step. Well, Sam, I never did try to adjust anybody's time schedule except in the direction the doctor's oath bound me to do. I guess one reason is, I never wanted anyone else deciding when it was time for me to go.

That is just about all I have to say, Sam. You know as well as anybody that I have been having quite a problem with my heart lately. Except for the pills, I could not have got through the nights this past week, and I'm going to be grateful for them now, because I have a feeling tonight is the end of the line for me. That may be a good thing. Charlie Richards has always been a natural gossip. I'm sure he'll do a lot more talking about this affair before he gets through, and at my age I do not wish to get involved in the kind of argument and wrangling that is going to result.

You can use this information

any way you like, just so the facts are made plain. I want my friends to have the story straight.

Good luck, Sam.

John Poirier

"Well!" exclaimed Dr. Hawes, laying the typed sheets on the table. "At least it's a relief to know that's how it was. You know, right up to the end of that letter, I honestly wasn't sure . . ."

"It's dynamite either way," said Bartlett. "Don't think it isn't. The opposition can make political hay with this thing if they get hold of it. A doctor on your hospital staff in cahoots with an undertaker! It would be a lot better if this letter just didn't exist."

"Well," said Dr. Hawes, "if a story was going to get around, he wanted it to be the right one."

"Maybe it doesn't need to get around," said Bartlett testily. "Old Richards promised he wouldn't say anything more until you'd seen Dr. Poirier. I don't know why Poirier had to go and assume that Richards would tell anyone else—"

Bartlett paused as his eyes met

those of Dr. Hawes and for a brief embarrassed instant each read the thought that flashed, uninvited, through the other's mind. Bartlett's eyes fell away and his glance went to the typed sheets on the table.

"What's that under his signature?" he asked, suddenly. "Something in pencil." He picked up the sheet. Scribbled faintly under Dr. Poirier's name was the word, "Over". He reversed the page and began to read the note that was pencilled on the other side.

"Sam, you have been after me so much today, maybe you will be the first to find this envelope. I just had a thought that is probably unworthy of me, but I wouldn't want to be the cause of you having to make a bothersome decision, so I believe I had better tell you—"

Bartlett broke off. "Oh, hell," he said.

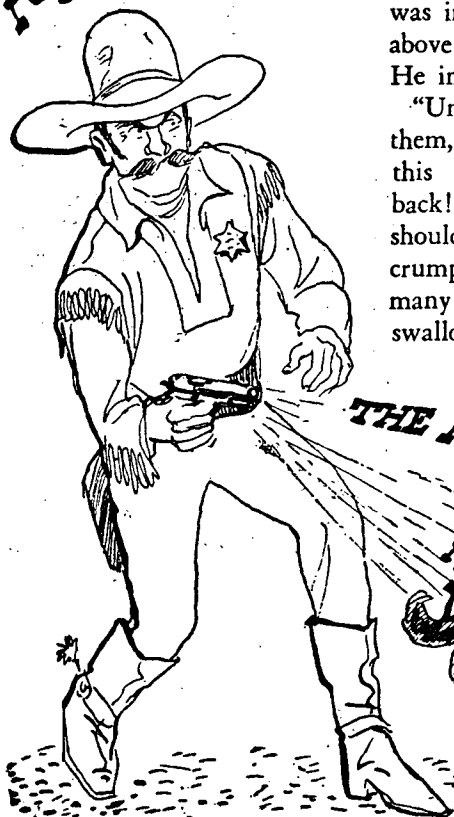
"Tell me *what*?" said Dr. Hawes. He snatched the sheet from Bartlett's fingers.

"—I believe I had better tell you," he read, "that I just went out and mailed a carbon copy of this letter to the editor of the local paper."



*From the 18th Century comes the axiom, "His pride in reasoning, not in acting, lies." The modern version seems to emerge conversely.*

by  
**Peg Granger**



**T**HE afternoon sun made opaque black pools of Clay McBride's eyes. He gazed unblinkingly at the bleary-eyed, whiskered man before him on the dusty street. His face was impassive and his eyes steely above his huge brown moustache. He inclined his head slightly.

"Unless you want the same as them," he ground out, "get out of this town and don't ever come back!" the man looked over his shoulder at the three bodies lying crumpled in the street like so many heaps of dirty laundry. He swallowed.

**THE FASTEST  
GUN  
IN THE  
WEST**

"I'm goin'," he muttered. "Ain't no room in these parts for two guns—not when one of 'em is yours, Sheriff." He turned, climbed on his horse with a servile, crawling motion. There was a dull clatter of hooves and a spiraling of dust and the man was gone. Clay stood there, staring after him, his big hand stroking his moustache as was his habit when another bank robber was run out of Dry Gulch.

"Cut!" rang in a new voice sharply. "That was great, Clay. That wraps it up!"

The extras, who had been standing around on the wooden sidewalks watching the showdown, relaxed, lit cigarets and began to converse in low voices. Beasy Weatherwax, veteran of some 75 westerns, got to his feet and walked out to where the tall figure of Clay McBride still stood motionless.

"That was great, Clay!" he said, slapping the tall man on the back. "Bet you're not sorry that's the last 'corney varmint' you're going to have to run out of town!" He smiled up at Clay, and was surprised there was no answering smile on the flinty features.

The director walked up to them. "I just wanted to say it's been a great series," he said. "In fact, I guess I've got to say it's been a

great series of series. What are your plans Clay? Going to take a long, well-deserved vacation?"

Clay shook his head slightly, as a person does who has had difficulty waking up. "Uh, I'm not sure, Sam. Beasy here has some plans, but I'm not sure."

"What do you mean?" Beasy demanded. "I thought we were going to Hawaii together—just lie around on the sand and watch the girls. Aren't we going to do that?"

"We'll see," Clay answered. He shook hands with Sam Bergman, waved at the rest of the cast and crew, turned and walked slowly down the street, tiny clouds of dust rising behind each spur. Beasy scurried to his side.

"Hey, where you going, Clay? You going out on the boulevard with your cowboy suit on? Your dressing room's the other way!"

Once again there was that almost imperceptible shake of the head. "Oh, sure, Beasy. Guess I was just headed back to the sheriff's office out of habit." He turned and went in the other direction, Beasy following along with him like a nervous satellite.

"Bet you're not a bit sorry they cancelled the series, are you, Clay? You must be awfully sick of being brave. What do you care if the doctors and the hillbillies are taking over TV? You've made your bun-



dle. Who needs television?" They approached a trailer on the back lot just off the set, and Clay ducked his head and entered. He peeled off his plaid shirt and leather vest and sat down before a battered mirror in his undershirt. He reached up and stripped off the moustache. His face looked strangely naked and vulnerable without it. He dipped his hand into a big jar of cold cream and began methodically to cream off his deep western tan.

Beasy had collapsed behind a table and slouched there watching him. "It surprises me every time I see you do this, Clay," he said. "That make-up—well, it makes a different man out of you. Without it you're completely different—like a bookkeeper, or something. It's almost like, when you get that moustache off and hang up your gun, you change completely."

Clay said nothing, merely finished toweling off the heavy brown grease paint and watched his own almost blue-white face appear from beneath it. He looked down at the moustache lying like a small dead animal on the dressing table before him. His hand automatically passed over his own cheeks, smooth and almost devoid of any masculine growth.

Beasy watched him, then laughed as he changed from his

western garb into the southern California uniform of light slacks and painfully bright sportshirt. "Remember when you decided to grow your own upper lip handlebar, Clay? That was funny. That long skinny thing on your face made you look more like the villain than the hero. How 'bout it, anyway? You about ready? I've got a couple of live ones lined up, and I thought that since you're all through here you'd. . . . Now what's the matter?"

Clay stood stockstill in his underwear, his gunbelt in his hand.

"Come on, Clay," Beasy went on. "You're not going to hand me that stuff about being too busy, or having to get up early or any of those other excuses I've been hearing for years. This time, man, we're



gonna *move*, and not with any of those gingham covered jobs you've been kissing right after you kiss the horse! Now, hurry up. I'll wait for you out by the gate." He clattered down the wooden steps outside the trailer and was gone.

Clay looked at the narrow tapered pants draped over the back of his chair, then slowly stepped into a pair of dark slacks. He pulled a shirt over his head, then took one long, slow look around the interior of the trailer, his eyes resting on each item as though he were trying to memorize it—everything from the carefully dented ten-gallon hat on the table to the rich brown moustache on the dressing table.

He sat down to put on his shoes, and a few minutes later he grinned. He had automatically pulled back on his boots. He fingered the spurs for a moment, then his expression tightened. Decisively he got up, strode across the room and strapped on his gun belt. It fit snugly around his hips and, when he shoved his arms into his long suede jacket and straightened, it was unnoticeable.

He stepped around the corner of one of the artificially weathered, false-fronted buildings and walked slowly up the main street, his spurs echoing hollowly on the now empty set. His eyes squinted into the

western sun, occasionally flicking from side to side as if to check the empty buildings for possible ambush. When he got to the studio gate he turned and gazed back at the ersatz town.

"What kept you?" Beasy called to him. "Come on, Clay, let's go." He hurried up to him and, by tugging at his arm, managed to turn him around and steer him out the gate.

Outside the high walls of the studio the air was fretful with the sound of complaining brakes and automobile horns from the nearby freeway. Clay stood still on the sidewalk a moment, frowning at the people jostling him as they hurried by.

Beasy said impatiently, "This last paycheck is burning a hole in my pocket. I've got to get to the bank before it closes at six. Then we'll have time to grab a sandwich before it's time to meet the girls. I don't know about you, but I'm hungry."

"Reckon that's a good idea," Clay drawled. "Man spends an afternoon gunnin' down two men, it makes him hungry."

Beasy looked up at Clay's expressionless face as he tripped along beside him. Then he started to laugh. "Hey, you had me going there for a minute. You sounded like the old sheriff of Dry Gulch himself. I don't know how we've

kept a straight face all these years. Think of it, Clay; you roaring into a saloon and saying, 'I'm gonna fill this room full of smoke and bodies,' or, 'Come on, men, we'll head 'em off at the pass! Or this gem," he stopped and bowed stiffly, unmindful of the smiling glances of on-lookers, " 'I'm right proud to have made your acquaintance, Miss Julie!'" He shook his head as they continued. "So help me, I think most of the writers grind out that stuff in their sleep."

Clay McBride said nothing. He just ambled along, his spurs audibly clanking above the growing noise of the freeway. The fringe on the arm of his jacket swayed slightly as he patted the barely perceptible bulge underneath.

They turned the corner and started to walk west. They crossed over the pedestrian bridge spanning the Hollywood Freeway, and Beasy looked down at the six lanes of cars, inching along like shiny beetles in the bumper-to-bumper traffic. He coughed as the exhaust fumes arose in the close air. "Maybe the horse should never have been replaced," he observed. "At least horses don't make smog!"

Clay glanced down at him, his eyebrows raised. "Sometimes I don't understand you, Charlie," he said. "That sounds plumb loco!"

Beasy looked up into his face

quickly and uneasily. "Say, what's with you, anyway?" he asked nervously. "I quit being Charlie back there when Sam hollered, 'cut'. Are you sure you're . . ." He broke off as they crossed the street on the other side of the freeway. "Anyway, here's the bank. Comin' in?"

"Nope," Clay answered. "I'll just lean here on this post and kind of keep an eye on things while you're gone."

Beasy looked at him a minute, then shrugged. "Suit yourself. I'll be just a minute." He ran up the steps, shoved open one of the big glass doors and disappeared.

Clay leaned back against a pillar, reached into his pocket and pulled out a bag of Bull Durham and a packet of brownish papers. Seemingly in one expert motion he rolled himself a cigaret, lighted it and inhaled. He looked down the cluttered boulevard through slitted eyes.

At that moment, an old car making a turn onto the freeway backfired sharply. Clay straightened, flipped away his cigaret, and flattened himself against the marble pillar of the bank. He squinted over his shoulder just as the bank guard approached the door to lock it. With the dying sun's reflection on the double doors, all Clay could see were the upstretched arms of the guard and the gun holster along-

side his leg. Clay didn't hesitate.

He moved with the speed of a cat. He leaped at the door, springing it inward, and landed right in front of the bank guard in a half-crouch, his right hand reaching backwards. "All right, stranger," he said easily, though his black eyes snapped, "I thought I told you to clear out of town."

A spear of light caught the flash as the bank guard whipped out his gun, and the air was split with the almost simultaneous report of two guns. Somebody screamed and in seconds a knot of people had gathered. Beasy shoved aside a balding man in a wrinkled suit. "What happened?" he demanded.

The bank guard, ashen and trembling said, "I don't know. He rushed in, went for a gun and. . . . Is he hurt bad?"

Beasy knelt by the crumpled form of Clay McBride. Gently he turned him over. A growing stain spread through the pattern of Clay's shirt.

"I thought he was going to rob the bank," the guard said.

Clay's eyelids flickered and once more the black eyes opened. "Wh—

what happened?" he asked. "I know I outdrew him. There ain't a man in the west can outdraw me."

Beasy stared at him at last with understanding. He swallowed hard, then said, "You got him, Clay. He just managed to graze you as he went down."

A faint smile touched the corners of Clay's mouth. "That's good," he said, his voice much fainter. He reached up, tried feebly to stroke his upper lip with his hand, then it fell back and he was still.

The bank guard found his voice. "Will somebody please tell me what is going on here? Who is this guy anyway?"

Beasy looked up and his eyes were filled with tears. "Mister, this here was the sheriff of Dry Gulch, the fastest gun in the west. . . . West Hollywood, anyway. Trouble was, he never shot anything but blanks."

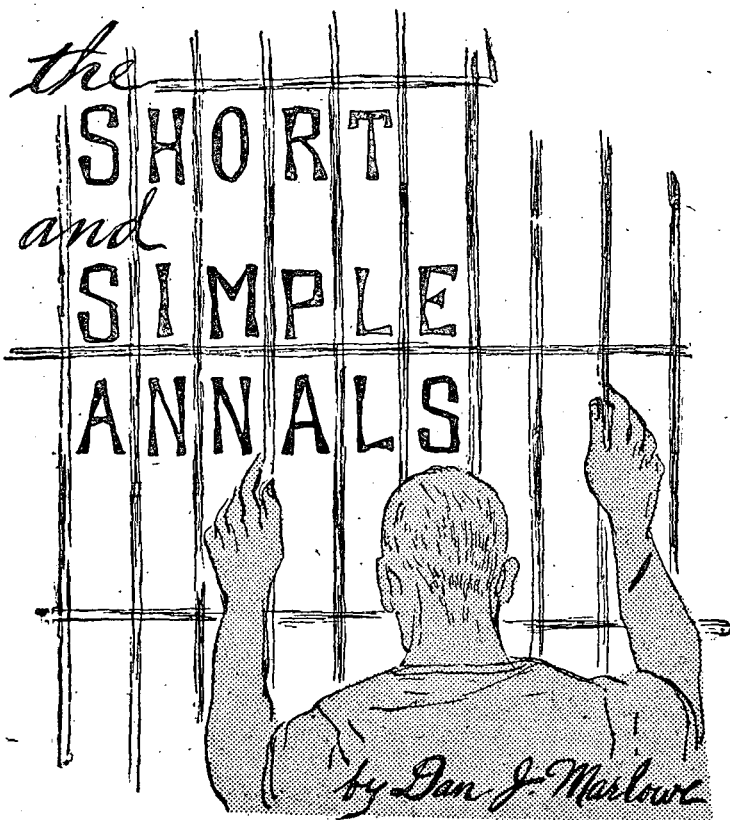
Beasy eased Clay's lifeless body gently to the floor and got shakily to his feet. "You call the cops," he said to the guard. "I think the least thing I can do is to go back for his moustache."



*I wonder if the principal of this little chronicle ever considered, conversely, the old aphorism, "Once is enough, but a second time will confirm it."*

I'd just come out from under the welding hood and was inspecting a silver seam intended to staunch a leak in a battered radiator when "Fat" Carson, the welding shop

hack, touched me on the arm. "You're wanted in the warden's office, Toland," he said. He led the way to the door, unlocking it and then carefully re-locking it behind



us, observing the regular procedure.

We marched down the echoing stone corridor while I tried to think where I could have put my foot down wrong. I was no stranger to such summonses, but I hadn't been up before the mast in some time. Carson left me at the door of Warden Wibberly's office, and I went in and braced in front of his desk, standing stiffly at attention. To the left of the chunky, gray-haired Wibberly, a big man in a dark business suit sat off to one side. It took a second look from the corner of my eye before I recognized Tom Glick, the precinct police captain from my hometown who'd sent me up. I'd never seen him out of uniform before.

"Have a chair, Toland," Wibberly said. "Smoke if you like." He actually sounded pleasant.

"Thank you, sir." I lit up quickly. You can't smoke under a welding hood. I sat at attention in the designated chair.

Wibberly opened a file folder on his desk. I knew it was mine, because one of the mug shots taken when I arrived at the prison was pasted to the outside of the tan folder. It showed a black-haired, rugged-looking type with big shoulders and a to-hell-with-you look in the eyes. I hadn't seen much of that look lately in my shaving mirror.

"I've been looking over your record here," Wibberly began. "Upon arrival you were close to being an incorrigible, but I note that in the past thirty months no disciplinary action has been necessary. Except for your choice of friends, I'd say that you made a good, if belated, adjustment." I didn't say anything. I wondered what he was leading up to. Off to the side, Glick was elaborately studying the lighted tip of his cigarette.

Wibberly closed the folder, cleared his throat, and looked directly at me in my chair. "I have news for you, Toland. A professional thief named Danny Lualdi was shot and critically wounded by a policeman. Before he died, he gave the police a list of the crimes he'd committed. The Gurnik Baking Company safe job was on the list, and bullets fired from Lualdi's pistol matched the one fired at the Gurnik watchman in the getaway, and which was later removed by the police from a door. There's no question Lualdi did the job."

I could feel the old adrenalin coursing through me. I couldn't sit still; I bounced upright, pinching out my cigarette and automatically dropping the butt into my pocket. "Then where does that leave me?"

I demanded. "I've done three years,

two months, and seventeen days for that job on the strength of a positive identification by Spider Haines, the Gurnik night watchman."

"It leaves you a free man." Wibberly gestured at his desk. "The governor has signed a pardon for you that takes effect at noon tomorrow. When it does, you'll be walking out that gate down there." He pointed to the steel doors in the forty foot gray wall that could be seen from his office window.

A buzzer sounded, signaling the 4:30 P.M. end of the prison work day. "In that case," I said, "if you've nothing more to say, I've got people to see and things to do."

I'd stopped saying "sir," and he'd noticed it. His mouth drew down at the corners. "Captain Glick has a word to say to you before you leave this office, Toland." Wibberly got up and left, closing the outside door behind him.

"I suppose you're already spending the money you're going to get for suing the state and the department for false arrest and imprisonment?" Glick rumbled at me.

"I hadn't had time to think of it yet, but thanks for the idea."

"Don't do it," he said. His tone was flat and unemotional.

"I'd like to see you stop me." I warned to the subject. "I'd like to see you try. Even with a pardon,

what kind of a job can I get when employers know where I've been? You bet your life I'm going to sue! Julie and the baby can use the money, too."

"Don't do it," he said again. "There are people who wouldn't like it." He rose from his chair. I'm no midget, but he outbulked me in all directions. "You're no rose, Toland. You had a previous record—"

"Misdemeanors!" I burst out. "A couple of fights . . ."

"The rap sheet says the charges were reduced from assault. And on the Gurnik job, Haines identified you."

"With you twisting his arm!"

Glick's rocklike expression never changed. "I picked up Marsh Wheeler the other day," he said. "Used to be a friend of yours, didn't he?" He was watching my face. Fear nibbled at me, sharp as a rat's teeth. "Old Marsh is going up this time. Open and shut case. He got careless." Glick was still watching me. "Didn't seem to be any point in it before, but maybe I ought to lean on him and ask him who his partner was in the days before you went away?" He waited, but I didn't say anything. I couldn't have said anything. Glick seemed satisfied with the impression he had created. "You're a machinist, or were," he said.

"Work at it. Stay out of my sight. And forget the suing." He strolled to the door.

Wibberly re-entered immediately. "All right, Toland," he said briskly. "See you tomorrow."

I got out of there, so mad I could hardly see. They thought they had me nailed down, did they? Well, I'd show them.

I had the guard who picked me up at the door take me down to the gym, where I usually went after work. Benny the Weasel Krafcik and Trigger Dunn were sitting on stools beside the lifting mat, talking. They were my closest friends in the prison—the choice of friends of which Wibberly had disapproved—but I didn't know how to break the news to them. I stripped to the waist and loosened up with the fifteen pound dumbbells, shifted to the thirties and worked up a sweat. I hoisted a barbell over my head a few times, then let it drop to waist level and did a few curls. It's good for the arms. I'd gone from a medium to a large size in shirts since I'd been on the weights, and I was only another layer of muscle away from extra-large.

Finally I broke into the low-pitched conversation. "I'm leaving tomorrow, fellas," I told them.

"That's too bad, Igor," Benny said. He called everyone who lifted

weights Igor, his idea of a joke.

"Year," Trigger chimed in. "What'd you do to get yourself transferred out? An' where they shippin' you to?"

"OUT," I emphasized. "On the bricks. Clean. A pardon."

Their smiles were both quick and genuine. It's not hard—in fact, it's extremely easy—to dislike the man getting out ahead of you, but these were my friends. Benny was a safe mechanic, and a good one. Trigger was a gunman. Nobody except a few intimates called him "Trigger" to his face. Benny lifted weights, too, but not Trigger. "How strong do you have to be to pull a trigger?" he'd ask, and laugh.

"How to go, man," Benny said softly. "This change your plans any?"

"It's going to speed them up considerably."

Trigger smiled. "Hope you remember everything Benny's pounded into you," he said.

The conversation died. I couldn't think of anything to say. I knew what they were thinking: *here's a guy making it to the street. By tomorrow this time he'll be doing all the things we'd like to be doing out there.* Anything I said would be so much rubbing it in. "You sure you got it all straight?" Benny asked finally. I rattled off names, addresses, and telephone



numbers. They both nodded. Benny had a few special questions. I answered them. He smiled, satisfied. The buzzer sounded for the end of the recreation period, and I exchanged a cross-handed handshake with them, both at the same time. They each said the one word: "Luck!" and we went off to our cells.

That night I wrote Julie a long letter. I told her about the pardon. I didn't tell her I was getting out the next day; I told her I loved her and the baby. Baby? Lucy was four years old now. And that I'd be seeing them the first of the week. The first part was certainly true, and I hoped the last part was just as true.

I was processed out by one o'clock the next afternoon. The prison clothing shop outfitted me with slacks and a sport jacket that fitted reasonably well. The warden handed me my pardon, a copy of my release papers, a one-way bus ticket to the city, my wallet, and \$86.14, the money I'd earned in prison. I went out through the steel gates, walked to the bus terminal, and caught the one-thirty bus, settling down in it for the ten-hour ride.

En route, during a stopover, I bought a cheap briefcase, shaving gear, a toothbrush, a shirt, and a couple of changes of underwear.

I'd left all my things behind me in favor of a fresh start. The briefcase was my only luggage when we reached town. I took a cab up to the Hotel Carlyle, where no one questioned my skimpy luggage or hatless, crew-cut head. I signed the register with my right name. When they came looking for me, I wanted to make it easy for them.

Despite my late arrival, I showered and shaved. Then I went out to a nearby steakhouse and savored every bite of a \$6.50 porterhouse. After strawberry shortcake and three cups of coffee, real coffee, I went to a pay phone and made two calls. Both parties assured me they'd had the word and would expect to see me the next day. I went back to the hotel, and after half an hour's tossing and turning on the strange bed, I finally fell asleep.

The first address in the morning turned out to be a barber shop in a rundown neighborhood. "I called here last night," I said to the bald-headed barber who was alone in the place.

"You're Trigger's friend who just got out?"

"That's right. I'd like to borrow a .45 Colt automatic and a clip-on holster."

"Borrow? That's not what makes the world go round, mister."

"Trigger said you owed him a favor."

He shrugged, and went to the front door and bolted it. He led me to another door in the back and up two steps into a narrow hallway that opened on what looked like an apartment in the rear. "Wait here," he said in the hallway. In five minutes he was back with the automatic, the holster, and a dozen rounds of ammunition. I wrapped the bullets in my handkerchief to keep the grease off my pants, and dropped the handkerchief in my pocket. I clipped the holster on my belt and holstered the automatic. It felt heavy, but it felt right.

Back out in the barber shop, I pointed to the large mail slot in the front door. "I'll drop these things back in here tonight," I said. "Wrapped." He opened the door and let me out.

The second stop was a cab ride across town. It was a barroom. I introduced myself to the bartender as a friend of Benny the Weasel, and he pointed out to me Benny's friend, who was waiting for me.

"I want to borrow Benny's vest," I told him, "and the kit. I'll return it tonight and you can put it away for him again."

"I'll bring it across the street to the diner in half an hour," he said.

He was ten minutes late. I was

on my second cup of coffee when he showed. He put down a heavy, brown paper-wrapped package on the counter beside me. I hefted it. It must have weighed twenty pounds. "I'll have it back by midnight," I said.

"Good enough," he said, and took off.

In a nearby pawnshop I bought a used suitcase. At a hardware store I bought a small can of paint remover, a large sheet of heavy brown wrapping paper, and a ball of twine. I put everything into the suitcase and moved on to a drugstore. I bought two dollars worth of stamps at a stamp machine. I added the stamps to the collection in the suitcase, and took another cab back to the hotel.

At the front desk I bummed an address label from the clerk. Up in the room I addressed the label to a fictitious address in a nearby town. In the upper left hand corner of the label I put Julie's name and return address. When the parcel turned out to be undeliverable eventually it would be returned to Julie's apartment.

I opened up the brown paper package and examined Benny's canvas vest. It was an adjustable type, and I had to loosen the straps before it fitted snugly under my sports jacket. It had twenty-two large and small pockets, and I took

a careful inventory of the contents. Everything seemed to be there. Because of a small drill motor in a pocket on the right hand side, I had to unclip my holster and re-fasten the pistol on my left, to avoid a suspicious bulge. With the weight of the kit distributed around the trunk of my body, I hardly felt I was carrying anything. I looked at my watch. Two o'clock. I took off the vest and stretched out on the bed for a nap. At six I got up and put the vest back on, re-clipped the holster, and buttoned the jacket over everything. I was ready to go. I wouldn't eat until after the job.

I walked the two and a half miles to Gurnik's. I had plenty of time, and no desire to test cab drivers' memories for faces in a police roundup. The bakery covered most of a block, and I came up on the rear of it, passing a mail box on the corner. The watchman's shack was just inside the four foot stone wall, behind the closed gate. I passed it on the wrong side of the street, and I could see the white-haired Spider Haines at his desk in the shack, the same wizened Spider Haines whose testimony had sent me up.

When he left the shack on his eight o'clock rounds, I vaulted the wall. Benny's information was that Haines made a tour of the plant

every two hours. At the back door of the main building I unloaded the suitcase; I put paint remover, twine, address label, and stamps in my pockets, and folded the wrapping paper and carried it under my arm. When Haines came back out the door after punching his clocks, I met him halfway through it. He took one look at the gun in my hand and another at my face and went right down on his skinny knees. "Don't do it, Toland!" he begged. "Glick *made* me testify!"

He had nothing to worry about, but he didn't know it. I wanted him very much alive. I prodded him upright with the pistol and hustled him down the corridor to where the cashier's office should be, according to Benny's information. It was there, all right, and so was the safe, a large double-door model.

I tied Haines into a chair. His eyes rolled up at me; he was shivering as though with an ague. I pulled the chair into a corner out of sight of the safe, and left him there. He wasn't about to make any noise; he had to figure he was a big winner. Besides, after sundown in that warehouse neighborhood, not even a good-sized explosion would have had an audience.

On my way to the safe I took the can of paint remover from my

pocket. I opened it, and spread a four inch border of it around the upper half of the door containing the combination dial. I gave it time to soften the paint, and then scraped it off with a putty knife I took from the vest. The bare metal of the safe door was now exposed. Working quickly, I took a two-pound lead block from the vest and screwed a steel handle into it. Using it as a mallet, I struck the face of the door sharply several times. Cracks appeared around the heads of previously invisible rivets that had been machined flush with the surface of the door.

Successful safecracking requires specialized knowledge, skill with tools, and physical strength. I centerpunched each rivet, and then drilled off the head of the dial. I took the pry-bar from the vest. It consisted of four six-inch steel lengths that screwed together. One of them had been the mallet handle, and it had several interchangeable tips. I used a flat tip first to loosen the front plate, and then switched to a hook shape to bend the plate down, exposing the concrete lining. After shifting again to a pointed tip, I knocked out the concrete to get at the bolt works.

It was hot, dusty work. A fine film of cement dust settled over everything. When I had the bolt

works exposed, all I had to do was remove one pin from the main bolt arm. The bolts retracted easily. The doors opened smoothly. This was no safe with another steel door behind the first one. The cash was right out in plain sight.

I scooped it out and piled it on the floor. The denominations on the packages of bills made pleasant reading. I found some cardboard for a stiffener, made a neat stack of the whole business, and wrapped it all up in the heavy brown wrapping paper I'd brought along. I tied it securely with the twine, using double knots, applied the previously prepared label and over two dollars worth of stamps, and was ready to drop it into a mailbox. In the post office's own good and sufficient time, the package would arrive at Julie's marked RETURN TO SENDER.

I slipped out of the vest and wrapped it, too, and I made two small packages of the gun and the holster. I went over everything in the place carefully with a damp rag, erasing possible fingerprints. I didn't forget Benny's tools. With the same rag I cleaned my shoes. After brushing off my slacks, I picked up my packages and went out the way I'd come in, stopping at the back door to pick up the suitcase and take that with me, too.

I dropped the money package into the mailbox at the end of the block. The suitcase I shoved into a doorway after wiping it for prints. I walked rapidly away from Gurnik's. When Haynes didn't make his ten o'clock round, someone was going to investigate. My nerves were screaming for transportation, but I made myself walk a mile before I hailed a cab. I made my first stop the barber shop, where I pushed the wrapped, pistol and holster through the mail slot. At the diner I left Benny's kit with the short order cook. Back at the Carlyle I took a long shower,

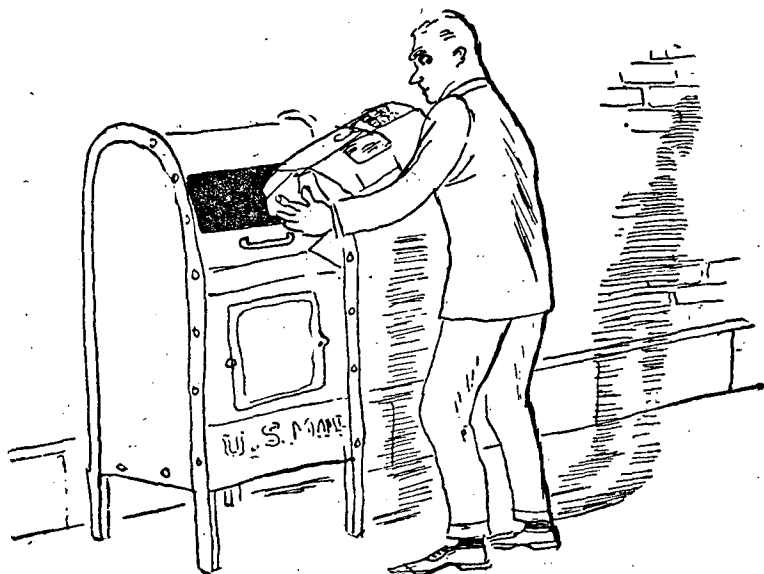
dressed again, and stretched out on the bed to wait.

I knew it wouldn't be long, and it wasn't.

When the pounding started on the door, I was sure it was Glick, even before I opened it. "Let's go," he ordered without preliminary.

"What's the charge this time, Captain?" I asked him. "Spitting on the sidewalk?"

He refused to answer. We rode downtown with a detective on either side of me on the back seat, and Glick glowering up front beside the driver. An Assistant District Attorney was waiting when



they brought me in. "Gurnik's safe was burglarized tonight, and the watchman says you did it," he started in on me. "You must be out of your mind, even if you think you did get a bum rap before. Now, if you turn over the money and make a full statement, I'm sure the judge will take it into consideration when he hears all the facts in the case."

I laughed in his face. "Mister Whatever-Your-Name-Is, I don't know what happened at Gurnik's, if anything did, but I'll tell you something. Spider Haines' testimony will never convict anyone again, let alone me. Didn't he already identify me once in error? You think a jury's going to believe him again?"

It wasn't that easy, of course. There was brow-beating and breast-beating, and telephone calls, and hurried, whispered consultations. They rushed me from room to room, fingerprinting me, and taking my picture. And at 2:00 A.M. they gave up and threw me out on the street. Glick's face was like a thundercloud. I walked along, laughing to myself. It was beautiful, just beautiful. I'd really put it over on them. All I needed now was to get rid of the load of tension that had built up in my stomach like a tight, hard ball. I ducked into a bar for a couple of

quick ones, liquid tranquilizers. I had three. I felt fine. I ordered a roast beef sandwich. I'd forgotten I hadn't eaten, and I was ravenous. I could feel the tension oozing away, and being replaced by a wonderfully expansive feeling. I counted my money. I wouldn't have much left after settling up at the hotel, but Julie wouldn't mind the drought before the payoff. It would take me a while to catch up on home living. I was looking forward to it. I didn't expect to mind a bit, waiting for the package to be returned by the post office.

I cabbed back to the Carlyle and went up in the elevator. I'd check out in the morning, but first I needed a good night's sleep. At the room I had trouble with the key in the lock, and for a second I wondered if Glick had turned nasty and ordered the lock plugged to keep me out. Then the door opened and I walked in. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Glick inside my room. With him was a big sergeant and a bigger patrolman, and an assistant manager-looking type with a passkey. "An afterthought," Glick said, moving between me and the door. "Sergeant Bonar here is going to take a specimen of the dirt under your fingernails to see if any of it matches the cement dust down at Gur-

nik's. So hold out your hands."

The long hot shower should have taken care of that, I thought hopefully.

"And he's going to vacuum the cuffs of your slacks," Glick continued.

All I could think of was the fine layer of powdery dust filming everything in front of the Gurnik safe.

It must have been the three drinks that made me bolt for the door. I tried to run right over Glick. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor, looking up at him from my back. "Put your little vacuum on him, Sergeant," he was saying. I heard the bzz-bzz-bzz of a small electric motor. "Looks fine," Glick announced. "Mooney, you can babysit with our friend here, while I check this out."

When the rest of them left, Mooney and I sat there like two bumps on a log.

After awhile the phone rang, and I took another ride downtown.

They're still after me about the money.

I haven't told them anything,

and I won't. I'm sure of that.

The insurance company is making the most noise. The district attorney's office is embarrassed by the newspaper publicity going back to the first Gurnik safe job, and they'd like to forget the whole thing. They as much as said that, if I'd come up with the cash, they'd see to it I was eased out the back door of wherever I was sent as soon as the headlines died down.

But there's Julie and the baby. I'm a real loser now. When I get out, I'll be good only for more of the same, or the ash heap. Either way, it doesn't leave much for them.

So I'm leaving it up to Julie.

When the package is returned, she'll know where it came from. If she wants to return it, and get me a lessened sentence, that's fine. If she doesn't, that's all right, too. She doesn't owe me anything except one small vow, and I figure I tarnished the brass on that a good while ago.

If I don't hear anything in another week, I'll be pretty sure of the answer.



*Purchases today are related closely to trust in the advertising media. Thus, we can see how "publicity of an irreparably bad nature" is to be peremptorily avoided.*

**M**ARK was the kind of little boy whom you disliked on sight. One of the reasons for this was that there was really nothing little boy about him. He was unfortunately without a shred of adolescent charm, eleven years old, and already he had the somewhat-warped and sinister look that comes to children who are precocious, malicious, and spoiled. Of average height, his head was just a trifle too large for his thin body, giving him an appearance of a sunflower on a stalk. He wore silver-rimmed glasses behind which his eyes alternately glowed and leered like a mad scholar's. His teeth were slightly bucked, so that when his lips came together they looked like a superior smug.

Mark had a talent for frustrating and aggravating people, and, as is the case with people of exceptional talent, he found great enjoyment and satisfaction in exercising it. He was quite intelligent, and did not deign to mix with the other children. He was by temperament and preference a loner at all times.

When the Camp Director phoned me a day or two before we left for Camp Tomahawk in the Adirondacks, he told me I was going to have Mark Russell in my group.

I must say I was, at first, privately pleased upon hearing that I was to have him in my group. I thought I could give him the sympathetic treatment he would so obviously need. A few months previously the boy had been victimized by a tragedy. His parents had died in their beds, mysteriously killed by carbon monoxide poisoning. Mr. and Mrs. Russell had been quite prominent people. Mark was an only child, so it was all very sad.

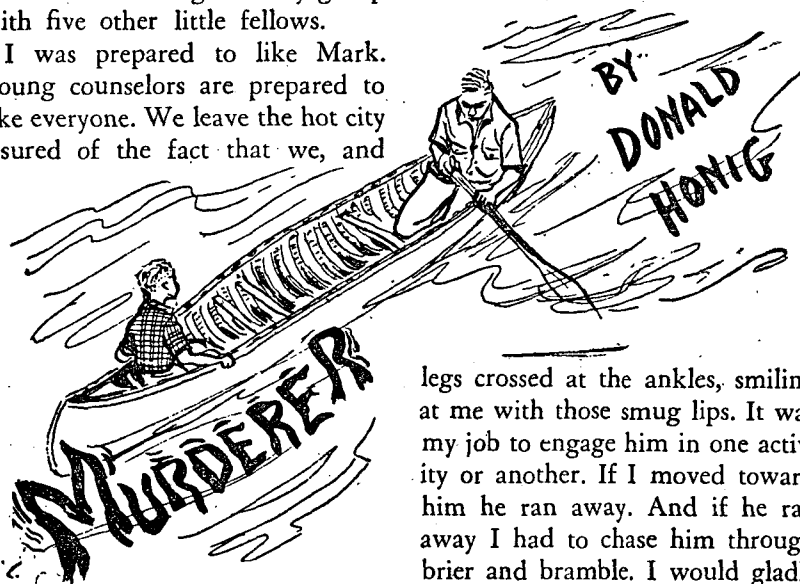
The police were at a loss to ex-

**JOURNEY  
WITH A**



plain the deaths and, though they suspected murder, were unable to get much further than that. The son (the newspapers and everyone else remarked upon his poise and his "bravery") went to live with an aunt, and now the aunt had shipped him off to summer camp and he was coming into my group with five other little fellows.

I was prepared to like Mark. Young counselors are prepared to like everyone. We leave the hot city assured of the fact that we, and



only we, will be able to make the children happy for the summer. We are prepared to teach them to swim, dance, play the guitar and sing folk songs, and to teach them baseball and basketball and all about nature and astronomy. We are prepared to be patient, sympathetic, understanding, and helpful, for we have all read at least one book by the indisputable Freud.

After one week I hated Mark. I hated him with a loathing that astonished me. Everyone in camp hated him. But I hated him the most, for he was my charge. I was responsible for him.

While the rest of the camp was engaged in activities, he would stand off by himself, arms folded,

legs crossed at the ankles, smiling at me with those smug lips. It was my job to engage him in one activity or another. If I moved toward him he ran away. And if he ran away I had to chase him through brier and bramble. I would gladly have let him go, and so would the Camp Director except that, in the latter's words, "If we misplace a child, it will give the camp publicity of an irreparably bad nature."

Mark wasn't full of mischievous mischief. No throwing of ketchup at the table for him. This little sadist would whisper to one child or another that he had just heard that

one of their parents had died. More than once some wailing child went flying across the length of the camp, rent with Mark's sadistic lie. Several times I caught him torturing some species of wildlife that he had captured, a frog or garter snake or some such thing.

And then there were those other times, when he went off by himself and it was not to torment me or make me run after him. It was when he wanted to be alone, when he began to brood. He did it most often in the rain, when we were confined to our bunks. I would watch him putting on his raincoat, his rubbers, his Maine fisherman's rain hat, and he would stare back at me, waiting for me to deny him permission. But I never did. I had learned that it simply did not work.

I would watch him from the window. He invariably went down to the lakeside and there would stand or pace, watching the rain spill into the lake. He could look so forlorn that even I, his most devoted foe, could feel a twinge of pity for his loneliness.

I ought to tell a word about myself. It has some bearing to the story. I was no bargain in the camp. Oh, I did all jobs as best I could, was honest and forthright and hard-working. But I came to be known as the "Foul-up Coun-

selor". It developed that I could not swim, for one thing. Oh, I had known about that, but I had neglected to inform the Camp Director of it when he hired me.

"I took it for granted," he said to me, "that any sensible human being who applied for a counselor's job could swim."

I was abashed. He had asked me to take a few deserving lads on a canoe trip down the lake. I told him I would gladly do it, but that if the canoe overturned the boys would have to save me, instead of me them. I did take several canoe trips down the lake, where it was very lonely and beautiful, but that was in the company of other counselors. I got to know the lake quite well and loved it, despite the fact that if the water were an inch or two over my head it could have drowned me.

Not swimming was one thing. I would not take a group on an overnight camping trip because I was allergic to something or other. And there were other things.

So there I was, having to work doubly hard to earn my keep, and stuck with Mark Russell in my group, a boy who made my life and my job miserable, whose recalcitrance detracted from the general enjoyment.

I tried to give my loner the benefit of every doubt. I theorized, in

the beginning, that perhaps the recent, brutal loss of both parents had temporarily demented the boy. If that was the case then he had no business being among normal, happy children. But before the summer was over I had changed my theory. I was convinced that the boy had murdered his parents.

Why did I think this? Well, certainly not for any reason that would have lasted five seconds in a court of law. I had nothing to bring to even the most zealous district attorney. It was simply my own intuition, biased maybe, but yet there it was.

Mark had a way of staring at me. He would do it during the rest periods that were a part of the daily routine after lunch and before the afternoon activity. I would be lounging on my bunk when I would happen to glance across at him and there he would be, stretched out on his cot, hands clasped behind his head, those inhuman little eyes—so inhuman they seemed almost part of his glasses—watching me. And he would be wearing his smug little smile. I would stare back at him. 'He wants me to know something,' I'd think. There was something he wanted me to know which he could not tell.

One night, before putting them to bed, I told the boys a story. It

was a good camp story, one with a moral. It involved the taking of human life and the severe punishment that befell the slayer. After telling the tale and reciting the moral to my solemnly engrossed little band of boys, I glanced at Mark. He was staring directly at me, one eyebrow slightly arched, as if to say, "Is that so?"

The cynicism of that arched eyebrow chilled me. I think it was after that when I became convinced I had a murderer in my group.

I mentioned this suspicion rather casually, half-jokingly, one night to one of my fellow counselors. He seemed startled, then interested.

"But why should he have done it?" he asked.

"The little monster doesn't need a reason," I said. "Why does he do any of the things that he does? He's just vicious and malicious. Maybe his parents wouldn't buy him something he wanted, and he became piqued and took his revenge."

"But the police don't even know how the carbon monoxide got into the room," my friend said. "I remember reading about it. They don't know a thing about any of it—motive, method or murderer. And did it ever occur to you that it might somehow have been an accident?"

No, it never occurred to me, not from the way that boy looked at me. No accident.

But he was still a young boy and no matter how precocious or self-reliant he might have been, many of his instincts, impulses and emotions were immature. As the summer wore on I became more and more convinced that Mark wanted badly to tell me something, and not because he liked, trusted or respected me in any way. I felt, in fact, that he rather strongly disliked me and would have liked to shock me with some bit of information, shock me, and also give himself the opportunity to brag. To keep a secret is a difficult thing for a child, and when that secret contains evidence of his own prowess or ingenuity, then it becomes the more troublesome to keep unspoken.

By mid-summer I was the only one in camp who paid any attention to Mark. The Camp Director had given up all hope of disciplining the boy, of getting him to cooperate, and as long as Mark did not interfere with the activities of the other children he had permission to do as he pleased, providing he remained on the camp premises.

I suppose my increasing interest in him was evident to Mark. I believe he was sensitive and intelli-

gent enough to perceive it. That it pleased him I was certain.

The counselors had one day off a week. I usually got out of camp as early as I could on my day off. But on this particular day I remained in camp. I didn't know why, at first, but it gradually dawned on me that my reason was to try and get Mark alone. Why? I couldn't say. It wasn't possible to talk to him. Maybe he would talk to me.

There was a softball game in camp that day, with the boys teamed against each other and all those not participating were sitting on the sidelines watching. In all this excitement it was simple for Mark to slip off and be on his own, as was his wont.

Sitting in my bunk I could hear the cheering coming up from the field. Suddenly he walked in. He looked at me as if I were not there.

"Hello, Mark," I said.

He said nothing. He went to his cot and sat down.

"I've got an idea," I said. "It's my day off. Why don't we get into a canoe and go exploring down the lake? I've heard there are some lovely spots down there."

He thought about it. And it seemed that he was deciding more than just the idea of going canoeing; it seemed that he was consid-

ering much more, his face was quite pensive. He passed me a long, searching glance, apparently uninhibited by the fact that I was staring back at him. Then, abruptly, he stood up.

"All right," he said. "It's a good idea."

We went down to the canoe rack. Together we lifted one off and turned it over. Mark got in. I shoved off and then hopped in with the paddle. I kept the canoe in near the shore for a while. When we were further down the lake I paddled out more toward the center. The lake waters passed under an old steel bridge and then narrowed considerably on the other side of it as the shoreline greenery closed in.

We saw no one, heard nothing. Mark sat in the prow, looking at me. He appeared to be mildly amused by something. Once he put his thin arms on the gunwales and began to rock the canoe. By the way I looked up he saw that he had frightened me.

"Hey," I said, "take it easy."

"It's true that you can't swim, isn't it?" he asked.

"Sadly true," I said, stroking the water with the paddle. "So be careful."

"I can swim like a fish," he said, not pridefully, but merely to acquaint me with a fact, and perhaps

one that I should bear in mind.

After a long silence, he said, "Why did you bring me with you?"

"I thought maybe we should have a talk, that maybe you might *want* to talk to me."

"Why should I?" he asked.

"I don't know. I simply had the feeling that you might want to, that's all."

"You mean there's something you want me to tell you," he said.

"Only if you want to. Only if you trust me."

"Oh I trust you all right," he said. To my ear there was an unfriendly sound in that, an intimation that he had me in his power, that I had no choice about being trusted. "What do you want to know?"

It was very bluntly put. It was not a vague question. It had a let's-get-down-to-business ring. He was sitting back quite comfortably, quite frankly, staring at me.

I paddled silently for a few moments, thinking what I should say. Then it occurred to me to be the same as he was . . . frank.

"I was curious as to what you knew about the death of your parents."

He put his head to the side and grinned, not at all upset or surprised, not a shred of poise gone.

"Why?" he asked.

"Curiosity," I said cryptically. "Well, I know a great deal about it, if you must know."

"You mean things you didn't tell the police?"

"That's right." He seemed to be enjoying this. He leaned forward and stared intently at me. "Do you want to know how that carbon monoxide got into their bedroom?" He was no longer a young boy but something dark and twisted.

I said nothing, looking over the side, staring at where the paddle noiselessly stroked.

"It was very simple," he said quietly, his voice becoming interested in what it was saying. "I simply slipped out after they were sleeping, pulled the car—I know how to drive, you know—pulled it into the alley under their window and left the motor running. Then I took a long rubber tube, attached one end to the exhaust pipe and pushed the other end through the ventilator. That's all. When it was finished I put the car back and went to sleep in my own room—with the windows wide open."

"Why?" I asked.

"I didn't like them," he said, a bit annoyed. He was peering at me quite intently again. His thin arms rose and settled on the gunwales, his fingers gripping tightly. "So, now you have this information,"

he said. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know," I said. I had stopped paddling. The canoe was motionless on the still water. We were about fifty yards from either shore.

"I can tell you," he said. "You'll do nothing. Because I can turn over this canoe in two seconds and drop you into the lake like a stone—before you have a chance to do anything about it."

And he did. A child can upset a canoe, and this child did. With a quick twist of his body he turned it over and we both went tumbling into the lake, Mark instantly swimming and splashing excitedly, like some small bloodthirsty shark.

But his excitement turned almost immediately to shock when he saw me get to my feet and stand there waist high in the shallow water.

At no time, with the brief exception of a hundred feet or so around the bridge, had we ever been in more than five feet of water. He hadn't known that, of course, but I had. But if he had overturned the canoe when we were around the bridge . . . well, his parents' murder might never have been solved, and Mark Russell would not today be in a place where he can harm no one. As for me, I would have been at the bottom of the lake.

*Like a wheel in motion, a lovers' quarrel may project divergent spokes, so one must study the hub to seek the cause.*

THE commuters' train from Boston, due to arrive in West Dexter, twenty-five miles west, at 7:50 P.M., was late. This didn't surprise anyone; local residents had long

ago dubbed this particular train as the Mystery Express. It was always a mystery whether or not it would arrive in West Dexter at all.

On this fateful night, only one year after the close of World War One, the train had picked up a single passenger at Boylston Junction, ten miles west of Boston. The passenger's name was Jeffrey Willis, a resident of West Dexter, pres-

# LOVERS' QUARREL



ently employed as an electrical engineer by a firm located in Boylston Lower Falls.

Willis entered the first coach behind the locomotive. Halfway down the aisle in the right hand row of seats sat Perry M. Thompson and his daughter, Margaret, a student at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Two seats behind the Thompsons, also on the right hand side, was Eddie Burdon, a student at Boston University. These three people were residents of West Dexter. The coach contained no other passengers.

If either of the Thompsons or Eddie Burdon were aware that Willis had entered the rear door of the coach they gave no indication. Willis paused only long enough to make sure that the setting was as he had viewed it from the depot platform outside. Then he moved down the aisle. He was wearing a dark blue suit and a grey hat and was carrying a folded newspaper in his right hand.

Willis slid into the seat across the aisle, but one row behind, the Thompsons where he immediately opened up his newspaper and held it so that neither of them could see his face.

The train jolted to a start. Eddie Burdon, who had been dozing, opened his eyes, yawned, and no-

ticed Jeff Willis sitting across the aisle from the Thompsons. Briefly he wondered about this. He knew, as did everyone in West Dexter, that Willis and Margaret Thompson were engaged to be married. In fact, the date had been set for their wedding on Thanksgiving day, less than two months away.

If Eddie had done more than briefly wonder, the tragedy that was to spark a reign of terror in eastern Massachusetts for a period of days might never have happened. But Eddie had remained in town to do some research at the Boston Public Library. He was tired. He wasn't naturally curious about other people's business. So he yawned again, closed his eyes and continued to doze.

At the tiny community of Farm Crossing, two stops east of West Dexter, the locomotive contracted a "hot box". None of the passengers on the Mystery Express, nor those on any of the other thirteen commuters' trains that shuttled back and forth between West Dexter and Boston daily, knew what a hot box was. They didn't care much. All they knew was that a hot box meant a delay of from fifteen minutes to an hour. They had come to accept these delays as they would delays caused by a blizzard, or a cow on the track, or a washout.



The conductor entered the rear door of the coach, hurried down the aisle while making his hot box announcement, and disappeared through the front door. Eddie Burdon grunted, seated himself more comfortably and went to sleep. The Thompsons stared through the coach window at the single naked bulb that dimly lighted the depot platform. Jeff Willis did not move. He remained hidden behind his newspaper.

Fifteen minutes passed. The muffled voices of the conductor, fireman, and engineer drifted back from near the locomotive where they were working. Eddie Burdon muttered, turned on his side, found this position uncomfortable and started to turn back, opening his eyes as he did so. Halfway turned over, he froze, and for a moment he must have thought that he was still asleep and having a nightmare.

Jeff Willis was pointing a German Luger at Perry Thompson's head. With no haste whatever, he calmly pulled the trigger.

Thompson's body jerked convulsively, but he somehow remained in an upright position. Willis shot again. This time the bullet entered Thompson's left ear. He fell sideways toward his daughter, seemed to bounce off her shoulder, and then he crumpled in

a grotesque heap between his seat and the back of the seat in front of him.

Margaret came out of her shock. She screamed. The scream was choked off when half uttered. A bullet from the Luger had entered her forearm. Three more followed, shattering the window beside which she was sitting. She started to rise. Another bullet furrowed its way along the base of her scalp. She fell forward across the wedged body of her father.

Jeff Willis got to his feet and walked to the rear of the coach. He still held the Luger in his right hand. Eddie Burdon hadn't moved or uttered a sound. He was numb with fear.

"Why didn't you jump him?" someone asked him later.

"You ever been that close to a guy with a smoking gun in his hand?" Eddie answered. "I'll tell you why I didn't jump him. Because I'm a damn coward, that's why." He shuddered. "His eyes! I never saw anything like them. They weren't eyes. They were holes burned into his head."

The conductor, James Alison, was halfway up the outside steps of the coach when Willis opened the rear door. Willis shot him between the eyes, then kicked his body aside and stepped down onto the depot platform. The engineer

and fireman were waiting there. The fireman was carrying a poker. He stepped up close to the side of the coach, and the poker was already completing its arc when Willis hit the depot platform. Willis half turned. The poker smashed into his left forearm, and even the passengers who had begun to spill from the rear coaches swore they could hear the bones breaking.

Willis, his left arm hanging loosely, clobbered the fireman with the barrel of his Luger, then swung the weapon toward the engineer. But the engineer was disappearing around a corner of the depot.

There were those who wondered why Willis hadn't shot the fireman, but the consensus of opinion was that the cunning, crazed instinct, which later became evident in all of his movements, now warned him that he had but two bullets left in the Luger. One of these he fired, at the crowd which was advancing from the rear coaches. The crowd scattered.

The engineer, now crouching behind a mail truck, told what happened next. "If I ever seen a mad dog in action it was this guy Willis. He stood there a minute, his head lowered and swinging from side to side. Yes, sir, just like a mad dog." This was later disproved. "Then he turned and went

back up the steps and I thought he was going back inside the coach and maybe finish off young Burdon. But he didn't. He went down the steps on the other side of the train, and that's the last I seen of him."

Farm Crossing had no police force, nor did any of the other nearby communities. The nearest policemen of which anyone was sure were the state troopers at the newly established barracks in North Farmington, ten miles to the north. The troopers were proud of their organization. They bragged that they could reach any part of the district which they patrolled within twelve minutes. They proved it that night.

The agent at the Farm Crossing depot had quit and locked up long ago, but the engineer, assuming all responsibility, smashed in a window and got to the telephone. Twelve and one-half minutes later the first of four troopers arrived, heralded by the night-splitting scream of his siren. Ten minutes after that an ambulance, containing a doctor and an intern from Central Hospital at North Farmington, waited to a stop beside the depot.

Detective Sergeant Henry Hapwell of the state troopers did what he could that night, but it wasn't until the next day that the real manhunt began. Because there was

no police force in West Dexter either, Hapwell called on John Saunders, chairman of the town's Board of Selectmen, early the next morning.

"I had men out patrolling the roads all last night," he told Saunders. "Didn't pick up a sign, so we'll have to start from scratch. That means talking to people like you, Saunders."

"Don't wonder," said John Saunders.

"Eh? Don't wonder what?"

"Slamming around the back roads on them motorcycles, roaring out a warning, I don't wonder you didn't pick up a sign. You won't neither."

Hapwell grew red in his beefy neck. "What do you mean, I won't neither?"

Saunders then revealed something about Jeff Willis' character that seemed unimportant at the time, but which later figured strongly in his capture.

"Boy's a born woodsman. He can live off the land. Knows every foot of the country around here. You won't catch him."

Hapwell laughed. "Are you kidding? A man with a broken arm, carrying a German Luger with only one shot remaining?"

"He won't use the gun. Make about as much noise as your motorcycles."

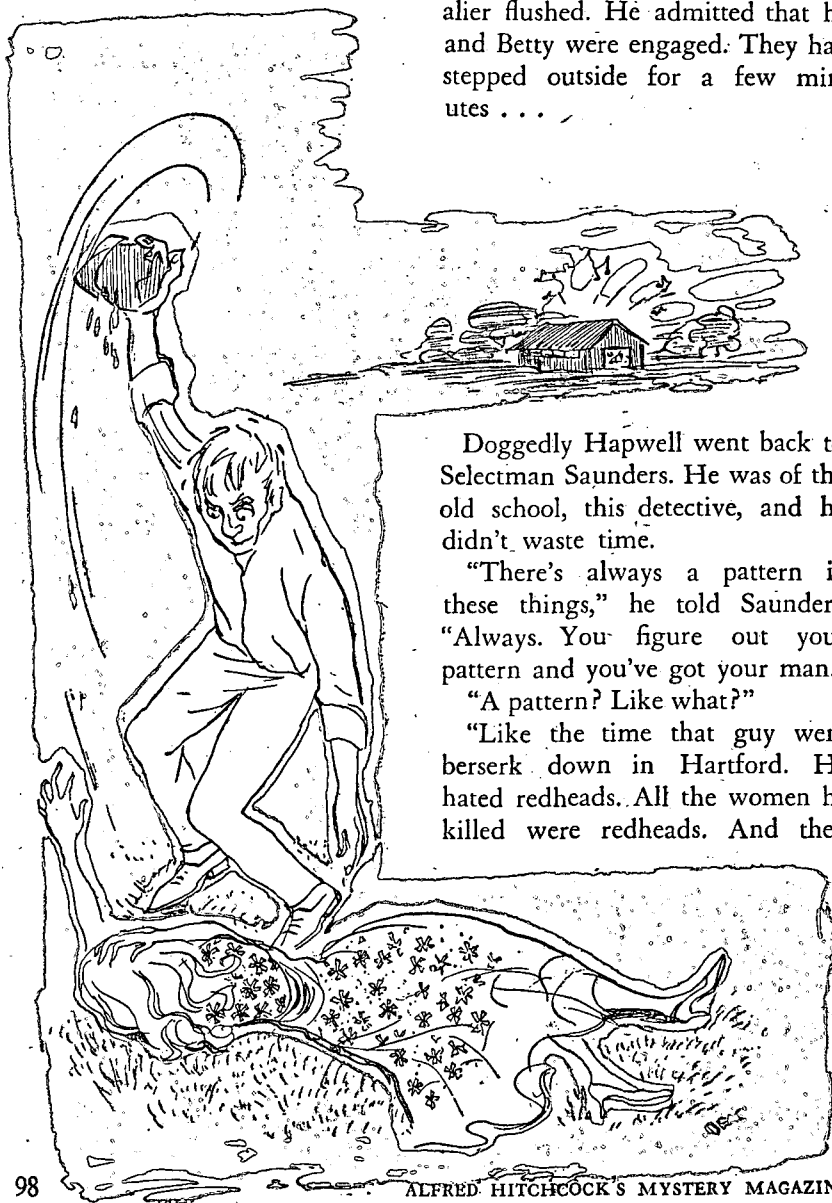
Saunders was partly right. Two nights later, Willis entered the kitchen of a remote farmhouse where two pretty girls, the Adams twins, had been entertaining their boy friends earlier in the evening, and he clubbed both the girls to death. Ben Adams and his wife, Sarah, returning from a trip to town around midnight, found them sprawled on the kitchen floor, their skulls split open. One of the girls had lived long enough to scrawl a message on the floor, using her own blood. The message read, "He said . . . we . . . were—" And that was all. The girl had died without finishing the sentence.

Sergeant Hapwell was a methodical man and he knew his business, or thought he did. First he questioned the two young men whom the girls had been entertaining. They were Jay Stewart, a neighboring farmer, and Jake Cavalier, a student at Boston University and a friend of Eddie Burdon.

Hapwell's questioning didn't gain him much. The two young couples had spent a normal evening. They had played whist for awhile, then Grace Adams had got up to prepare some refreshments. Jake Cavalier had put a record on the Victrola and he and Betty Adams had danced for a few minutes. After that they ate, and the boys, because both had to be up

at the crack of dawn, had departed.

"Any smooching go on?" Hapwell demanded roughly. Jake Cavalier flushed. He admitted that he and Betty were engaged. They had stepped outside for a few minutes . . .



Doggedly Hapwell went back to Selectman Saunders. He was of the old school, this detective, and he didn't waste time.

"There's always a pattern in these things," he told Saunders. "Always. You figure out your pattern and you've got your man."

"A pattern? Like what?"

"Like the time that guy went berserk down in Hartford. He hated redheads. All the women he killed were redheads. And then

there was another guy who hated actresses. Tell me all you can about this guy Willis."

Saunders told him. Willis came from a respected family. He was well liked. He sang in the choir at the Congregational church. He was a hard worker. Steady. Reliable. Quiet. He had a good war record. His hobbies were hunting and fishing. He and Margaret Thompson had been engaged for almost a year. As far as anyone knew they had never quarreled.

Everyone connected with this business seemed to be normal. It didn't add up. There had to be a pattern. A reason.

Hapwell drove over to Central Hospital. Margaret Thompson was still alive, but that was all. She was in a coma. Could he talk to her? No. What were her chances? Less than fifty percent.

Hapwell talked to Jay Stewart and Jake Cavalier again. He made them go over the events of the evening in detail. He tore apart everything they said and put it back together again. Nothing.

But Hapwell knew his business. There had to be a pattern.

The following night pretty Doris Moore, returning alone from a social gathering in the town of Ashford, ten miles from Farm Crossing, was attacked and beaten to death with a sharp, jagged in-

strument, probably a sizable rock.

This blew the lid off the countryside. The reign of terror was on. Every parent for miles around kept their daughters at home, their doors and windows bolted.

A posse of more than a hundred men, armed with shotguns, hunting rifles, pistols and knives, was formed and began a methodical search of the heavily wooded area. Detective Hapwell didn't join the manhunt. Something was stirring in the back of his mind, but he couldn't make it take form. He was sure, however, that it was the key, the clue he needed to reveal the pattern.

He drove over to Ashford and talked to people who had attended the social gathering that Doris Moore had left early and alone. The social had been conducted by the Ashford Historical Society. It was the first one of the season. Similar socials were conducted throughout the fall and winter seasons in most of the hundreds of small towns and hamlets that dotted the area.

They usually started off with a lecture by some local historian. This was followed by a period of old-fashioned square dancing. Then came refreshments and the usual intermingling of guests.

Did Doris Moore have a boyfriend? Hapwell wanted to know.

Yes, his name was Carl Nelson. They were to be married around Christmas. Carl was out of town on a business trip, which accounted for the fact that Doris had walked home alone.

Without knowing why, and frustrated because of it, the stirring in the back of Hapwell's mind was now clicking away at a great rate. Still he couldn't give it form. Vaguely he felt that the answer lay with Margaret Thompson. Two minutes of conversation with the wounded girl and he felt he could come up with a solution.

He called Central Hospital, but Margaret was still unconscious. She had, however, seemingly passed the crisis and might return to consciousness any minute. But any minute wasn't soon enough. A maniacal killer was at large. He could and would strike anywhere at any time.

Selectman John Saunders had been right about Jeff Willis. For three days the man with a broken arm and a Luger pistol had been living off the land. The hundred-man posse, though they spent a full day and a night in the field, didn't catch a glimpse of him. One member did find something—the Luger pistol with the remaining shell intact.

Detective Hapgood went back to West Dexter and routed out Phil

Merryweather, Jeff Willis' best friend, to whom he had talked twice before.

"Now look here, Merryweather, I want you to think hard. Are you sure neither Willis nor Miss Thompson gave any indication there had been a quarrel?"

Merryweather screwed up his forehead and refused to meet the detective's eyes.

"Well, I don't know," he began, and Hapwell practically jumped down his throat.

"What do you mean you don't know? You told me before there had been no indication of a quarrel. Now was there, or wasn't there?"

Young Merryweather continued to scowl. "I still don't know," he said sullenly, "but that morning—the morning of the night it happened—the 7:40 a.m. commuters' train was pretty crowded. It was a Wednesday. That's the day all the local shopkeepers go to Boston to do their buying. Well, Jeff and Margaret got a seat together, but I had to go quite a ways up front. Usually I sit across the aisle from them, and we'd talk about the wedding. I was to be best man."

"Yeah," said Hapwell, trying to control his impatience. "What happened?"

"Nothing, really. Jeff always gets off at Boylston Junction and takes

another train from there over to Boylston Lower Falls. I usually sit with Margaret for the rest of the trip into Boston."

"So you came back from up front to sit with her when Jeff left the train at the Junction. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right. And, well—" He let it hang for a minute.

"Well what?"

"I didn't think much of it at the time." Merryweather grinned. "Jeff usually kisses Margaret goodbye. Last Wednesday he didn't. He just got up and got off the train without saying anything. The aisle was full of people and I had to jump to get the seat he'd vacated."

"And you think they'd quarreled?"

"I didn't say that."

"But you thought so?"

"Not at the time. But now, with everything that's happened, I remember Margaret was pretty quiet during the rest of the ride."

"Then why did you think they'd quarreled?"

"I didn't. Quit putting words in my mouth." He paused. Hapgood held his tongue. "Yesterday I got to thinking. I remembered asking Margaret if she and Jeff were going to the dance on the following Saturday."

"And?"

"She said they weren't." Merry-

weather shrugged. "It isn't much." He suddenly looked sheepish. "It isn't much at all, is it? I should have kept my big mouth shut."

A glint had come into Hapwell's eyes. "Just one thing more, son. Did Margaret say *why* they weren't going to the dance?"

"No. She just said they weren't going. That's all."

Excitement beat through Detective Hapwell. For the first time since the shooting he felt that he had something into which he could sink his teeth. Soberly he considered the thought that was taking form in his mind. When examined in the clear light of logic and reason, it seemed fantastic, so fantastic, in fact, that Hapwell decided not to mention it to anyone. He decided to abandon the idea as being worthless. But that afternoon an incident occurred that caused the detective to do a complete about face.

On October 20th the hunting season for upland game opened. This year there were no solitary hunters. Men traveled in pairs and small groups, and all of them were on the lookout for human game as well as for pheasants and partridges. There was the usual influx of city hunters. Among these were James L. Cranston and his lovely daughter, Beth. She loved hunting and never missed a season. This

year she was carrying a new twenty gauge, a present from her father.

Father and daughter had hunted the area many times before. One of their favorite spots was a marshy ten acres known as Wilson's Swamp. It was covered with waist-high grass, with occasional clumps of alders. In its center was a higher piece of ground on which grew scrub pine and birch and maple trees. This was known locally as the "Island".

The Cranstons entered the swamp from the south shortly after sunrise on the opening day. They worked without a dog, doing their own quartering, moving slowly toward the Island, keeping about twenty-five yards apart.

For the first time in the years they had been coming here, they failed to flush a bird. At the south edge of the Island they drew together. After a brief consultation it was agreed that Cranston would take the west side of the Island and Beth the east. They wouldn't, Cranston knew, be out of sight of each other for more than ten minutes at the most.

So they parted. Beth decided to walk along the edge of the woods. She thought the brush might yield a partridge or two. Beth had read about the maniacal slaying of the Thompsons, but it didn't occur to

her that there was any danger. Things that you read about are seldom associated with yourself.

And so it came as a complete surprise and shock when she rounded a clump of bushes and came face to face with Jeff Willis.

"I knew it was Willis the moment I saw him," she related later. "I'd seen his pictures in the paper, and his left arm was hanging uselessly at his side. For a moment I was paralyzed with fear. I couldn't move. Then I remembered my gun and started to lift it. Willis stepped forward so swiftly it was as if he hadn't moved at all. With his right hand he seized the gun and jerked it out of my hand." She paused and shuddered slightly. "I thought he intended to beat me to death with it, as he had the others, but he flung the gun away from him and then just stood there staring at me." Again she paused, screwing up her forehead as though seeking an explanation for what happened next. "His eyes weren't wild looking or—or anything like the newspapers said. Except for his beard, which was heavy and black, and his broken arm and a few scratches on his face, he looked—well, he looked—wistful! That's the only word I can think of to describe his expression."

Beth had screamed then, and her



father quickly had shouted in reply.

"Willis threw up his head like a startled deer when he heard Father shout," Beth related. "Then he looked at me and he seemed mildly reproachful. He waited a minute, then faded off into the woods."

James Cranston found his daughter's gun, and then they headed out of the swamp. Back on the highway they met a group of four other hunters. They told about seeing Jeff Willis. Three of the hunters and James Cranston went back to search the area. The fourth hunter and Beth Cranston waited in the automobile. An hour later the four men returned. They had not caught a glimpse of Willis.

The party drove back to West Dexter and reported the incident to Sergeant Hapwell, who had set up headquarters in the town hall. He reproached them bitterly for the hour they had wasted in their fruitless search.

Six troopers and as many volunteer townspeople headed for Wilson's swamp. Sergeant Hapwell closeted himself in the tiny office which had been assigned to him. His fantastic idea had suddenly become full blown again.

After a call to the War Department in Washington, D.C., Hapwell had acquired the following information:

Jefferson Willis, after being shipped overseas, had shown tendencies toward being neurotic. During his first action the tendencies had developed into actualities. For more than a month he had remained under observation in a field hospital. A month after that he had been sent back to the States and discharged. He had been proclaimed, the man in Washington told Hapwell, an incurable psychoneurotic.

Sergeant Hapwell now found himself working against time. He had a trap to bait and he had to bait it fast, before Wild Man Willis clubbed any more women into eternity.

A phone call brought Policewoman Anna Segewick and special plainclothes officer Mike Tanner over from North Farmington. Hapwell met them on a deserted stretch of road outside of West Dexter's town limits.

"There's a lake right here," he explained, indicating a blue dot on an automobile road map. "It's called Winthrop Pond. On the north shore there's a shack owned by Selectman Saunders. He and his pals use it as a hunting camp." He handed the pair a key, then transferred a cumbersome object from the trunk compartment of his car to theirs. "Now listen closely."

Policewoman Anna Segewick's

eyes, which had grown wide at sight of the cumbersome object, now widened even more. She was a full-breasted blonde, beautiful, glamorous. Mike Tanner was a good looking kid, six feet tall with muscles. He and Anna had teamed up before.

When Hapwell finished, Mike looked at him skeptically. "You think it'll work?"

Hapwell said simply, his voice grim. "It's got to work, Mike."

An hour before sunset Anna Segewick and Mike Tanner arrived at the shack on the lake shore. They lit the four kerosene lamps in the place, built a roaring fire in the fireplace, then put together a meal from the well-stocked cupboards. Afterward, while Anna washed the dishes, Mike wrestled the cumbersome object in from the trunk of his car. It was a table model Victrola. He cranked it up, put on a gay dance tune and set the needle in place. Anna came from the kitchen bearing a couple of watered-down whiskies and they had a drink. Following this they opened the windows wide, put a new record on the Victrola and began to dance, laughing and carrying on in great shape.

From then until long after midnight the woods resounded to the incongruous sound of a scratchy

Victrola playing such then popular hits as *Tell Me, I Might Be Your Once In Awhile, In An Old Fashioned Garden* and *There's A Long, Long Trail*. Adding to the music, Anna and Mike lifted their voices in raucous song and laughter.

By one o'clock nothing had happened, and shortly thereafter the couple, exhausted, went to bed.

The next day they slept late. Following Hapwell's instructions, they waited until after sundown before beginning their night of revelry. On the second night, the music was louder, the laughter and song more raucous.

At the stroke of twelve both were ready to call it quits. Before going to bed, Anna, despite her aversion to outside plumbing, had to respond to the call of nature. Mike courteously agreed to accompany her on the errand, but she blushing and somewhat sharply declined. Mike parked his shoulder against the jam of the shack's rear door and watched her retreating figure.

"The outhouse," he explained later, "was located about twenty-five yards to the rear of the shack, behind a clump of bushes. Anna had barely disappeared behind the bushes when I heard her scream. This was followed by a crashing sound, a muttered oath and the sound of a blow.

"By this time I had covered twelve of the twenty-five yards. I hadn't bothered to pick up my service pistol which I'd laid on the kitchen table while we were dancing.

"In four more strides I crashed around the edge of the brush. Anna was lying on the ground. And here this big guy was standing over her, his right hand holding a club as big as a baseball bat, his left arm hanging loose. He'd lifted the club to hit her again, and just then I yelled. The yell seemed to make no impression at all on Willis. He didn't even turn his head. He started his downward swing, and I knew I couldn't make it in time.

"Then there came the flash and roar of a gun from a spot near the outhouse. The bullet hit Willis in the chest and flung him around as though he'd been jerked by a rope. He stumbled and fell over backward, and the club fell on him."

Sergeant Hapwell came from his hiding place near the outhouse, holding his smoking pistol and looking grim. He walked up to the

fallen Willis and stood looking down at him for a minute, then dropped to his knees. "He's dead," he said after a perfunctory examination.

Mike, who had bent over Anna Segewick, turned a white and bleak face toward Hapwell. "He'd better be," he remarked wretchedly. "Anna's dead too."

Hapwell pulled the ends together for the Boston newspapers. "Margaret Thompson liked gay times, parties. Willis' first love, next to Margaret, was for the outdoor, primitive life."

"Next to Margaret?" a reporter asked. "I don't get it."

"Most folks don't and won't," Hapwell replied grimly. "Maybe Margaret Thompson will give us the answer."

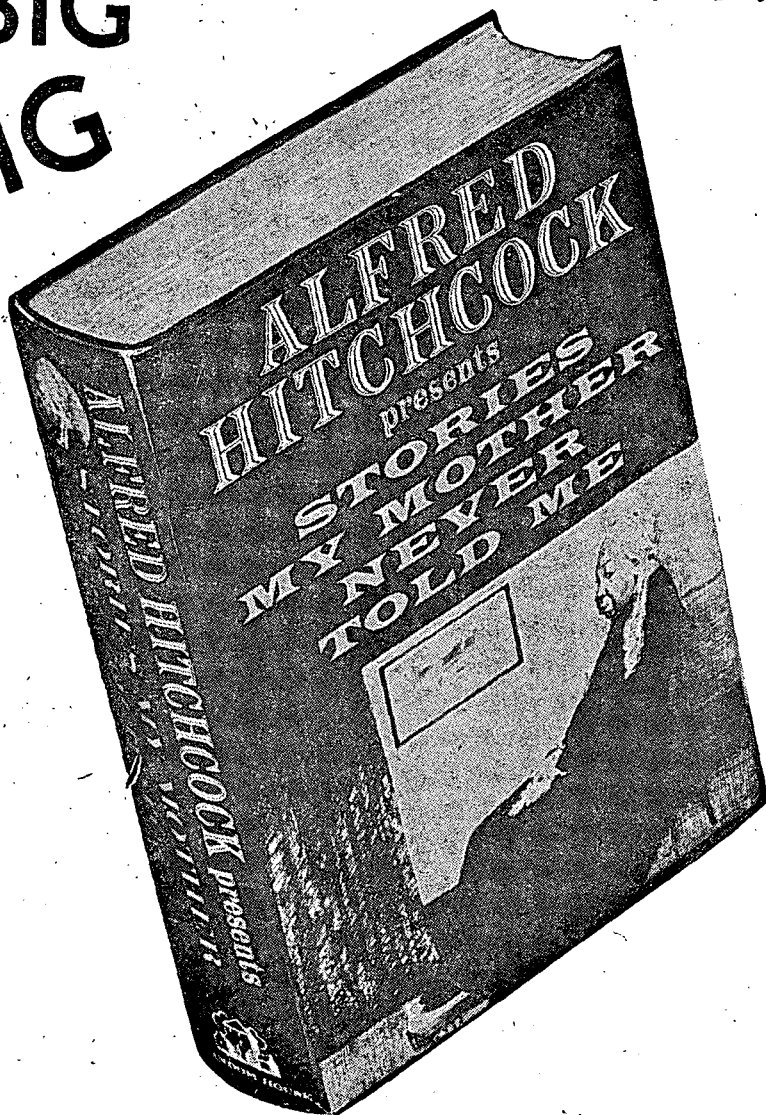
Margaret Thompson did, two days later, when she returned to full consciousness. She hesitated for a long time. Then, her voice so low Hapwell had to bend over to hear, she whispered. "He wouldn't learn. He—couldn't dance."



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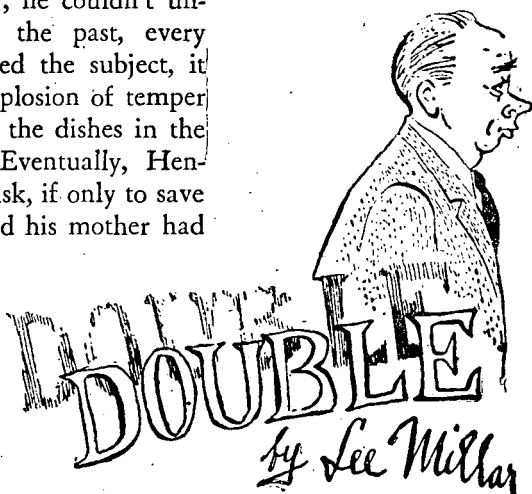
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*After perusing the following anecdote, we might be persuaded to consider some hazards of the push-button era before advocating the ultimate in automation.*

**T**HE walk from the bus was always a long and tiring one for Henry Bennett. Why he couldn't get Alice to plan dinner so she'd be able to pick him up at the bus stop with the car, he couldn't understand, but in the past, every time he mentioned the subject, it brought on an explosion of temper that would make the dishes in the sideboard rattle. Eventually, Henry had ceased to ask, if only to save the good Haviland his mother had left him.

would look accidental, with no finger of suspicion pointing his way. One night he had even gone so far as to type out a suicide note and forge Alice's signature at the bot-



It seemed unusually cold for the end of September, Henry thought, as a little shiver went through his body. Or was the chill due to the fact that, at the moment, he was seriously considering murdering his wife?

Over and over these past few months, Henry had tried to work out a perfect plan, one where it

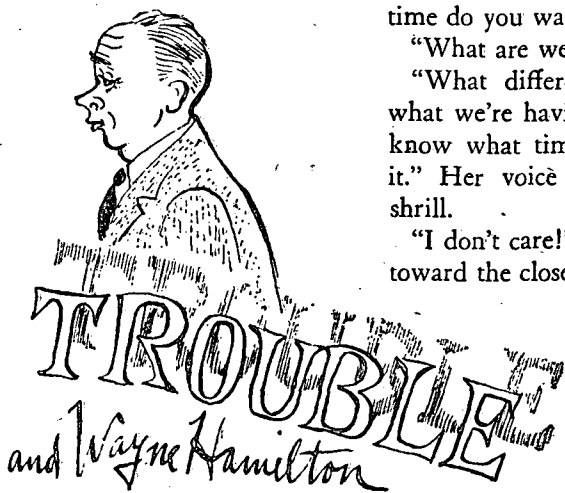
tom. The only thing that stopped him was the remembrance of a television show he had seen a week or so earlier, where the forgery had been discovered and the murderer unmasked.

"Damn television, anyway," he had thought out loud. "They use up all the plots before I can get around to them."

Henry sighed as he trudged wearily up the short flight of steps to the front door. Now he'd have to think of something else—again!

He had hardly opened the door when Alice's voice bellowed from the kitchen. "I don't suppose my luck has changed. No doubt that's you, Henry, and not Rock Hudson."

Henry closed his eyes for a moment as if to control himself. "Yes,



it's only me," he called back. To himself he mumbled, "Better it should be a werewolf!"

The voice resounded from the kitchen, "Well, don't just stand in the hall. Why don't you go into the livingroom and watch television—for a change!"

The sarcasm was not lost on Henry. "Yes, dear," he sighed.

He removed his coat and hat, meticulously hung them in the hall closet, then picked up a pair of slippers from the floor, carrying them with him into the livingroom.

"What time do you want dinner?" the voice asked.

Henry slumped into a large, easy chair and closed his eyes.

"I said," the voice went on when no answer was forthcoming, "what time do you want dinner?"

"What are we having?"

"What difference does it make what we're having? I just want to know what time you want to eat it." Her voice was annoyed and shrill.

"I don't care!" Henry flung back toward the closed kitchen door, let-

ting his temper get the better of him.

There was a loud bang, as Alice evidently set a pot angrily on the stove. The kitchen door burst open and she stood in the doorway, glaring at Henry and shaking a large spoon at him.

"What do you mean, you don't care? I spend hours working over



that lousy stove to make a decent dinner for you, and you say you don't care!"

Through half-closed eyes, Henry surveyed his wife: the sharp, features he had once thought "aquiline"; the thin, wispy hair he had once considered "the mark of good breeding"; the bony, angular body and small breasts he had cataloged as "svelte".

"Isn't she lovely!" Henry thought to himself, then giggled inwardly. "There she is—Miss America!"

"What are you smirking at?" Alice asked. "Are you laughing at me?"

Henry hadn't realized he had smiled. Quickly he assumed a sober face.

"Well, why don't you say something?"

"It's getting cold out." Henry mumbled.

Alice stared at him in disgust, then turned again toward the kitchen. "Dinner in fifteen minutes!" The door swung violently back and forth after her.

Henry watched the swinging door, as if it would give him the answer to his dilemma, but nothing popped into his head. He picked up the paper on the table next to him and started to read.

That's when he found it. It was in the Personal column. Henry, al-

ways read the Personals, just as he always read "Dear Agnes" and "Advice to the Lovelorn"—just to see if there were others who suffered as much as he.

It was the fourth ad down, right under the one from "Andy", who was looking for his wife. (That had amused Henry, because he couldn't imagine anyone looking for a missing wife!)

The ad started off simply enough: "Tired of doing your own housework, but can't afford a maid? Need an extra pair of hands to do your chores?"

Henry snorted and was about to skip to the next personal, when one sentence caught his eye and forced him to read the ad to the end.

"For a total cost of \$3,000 you can own a lifelong servant! Guaranteed to look, act, feel and talk exactly like a human being. A beautiful marvel of electronic science. Transistorized, with printed circuits; very few parts ever need replacing. All workmanship guaranteed for life. Made to your individual specifications, if desired, for slight additional cost. Must be seen to be appreciated!"

The name of the company and the address seemed to jump from the small print at Henry:

Humanoids, Inc.  
117 N. Pike St.,  
Los Angeles, Calif.



At lunch time the following day, Henry made his way toward 117 N. Pike Street. He had even talked his boss, Mr. Evans, into an extra hour, pleading a doctor's appointment.

The wind whipped at his coat as he turned north on Pike. 111—113—115—then, there it was—117!

It was a small store sandwiched between an Italian grocery and a Chinese laundry. One could have passed it easily, never noticing the small, gold letters on the window that proclaimed it to be the home of Humanoids, Inc.

Henry paused a moment outside the door, trying to see into the interior, but heavy curtains across the door prevented this, and there were no windows.

He took a deep breath, drew himself up, and walked in.

The next month was one of exciting, almost unbearable bliss for Henry. Even Alice's constant nagging, complaining and sarcasm went unnoticed, and, sometimes, when he appeared engrossed in television, he contemplated his future—his almost immediate future.

The man at Humanoids, Inc., Mr. Carlson, had been extremely helpful. Yes, he had said, they could make any kind of Humanoid to any specifications. The additional charge would only be a

nominal \$500 for a facsimile.

"No, Mr. Bennett," Mr. Carlson had said, "even though they are robots, we refer to them as Humanoids. Yes, Mr. Bennett, we can make one to look, act, talk and react exactly like you. Yes, Mr. Bennett, I understand what a marvelous joke you have in mind. How nice that there are people in the world today who can afford such expensive jokes. No, Mr. Bennett, we wouldn't *think* of telling Mrs. Bennett!"

Henry spent each lunch hour during the next month at Humanoids, Inc., while they tested his skin and hair for texture and coloring; measured his height, weight, shoulders, arm length, leg length, waist, hands, fingers; counted the number of crow's feet around his eyes; measured the exact drop of his double chin, and took tape recordings of his voice, including his pet expressions, swear words, idioms, and any slight trace of dialect he might have. Nothing was left unmeasured, untested or unrecorded.

Finally, reams of notes and sheaves of equations were ready to be fed into the computer for a final and perfect formula which would eventually become the identical twin to Henry Bennett.

On the night before he was to pick up Henry, Junior (as he fond-

ly referred to his purchase) Alice was particularly unbearable.

"Oh, to be finally rid of this woman!" Henry sighed.

After Alice had registered her last complaint of the day, vented her last criticism of Henry, and consequently run out of conversation, she went quickly to her bedroom and retired, much to Henry's relief. He had many things to do, and he needed her out of the way.

He went to the cellar and looked over the set of luggage he had recently bought and had packed while Alice was asleep. Everything was ready. He need only pick up Henry, Junior the next day, deposit him in the house while Alice was at her bridge club, pick up his luggage, head for the bank and empty the safe deposit box of the \$10,000 in joint savings, board the S.S. KYOTO, sailing to the Orient, and . . . relax!

He chuckled in anticipation, and wondered how long it would be before Alice would realize she was living with a robot, and not the real Henry. He also wondered HOW she would find out.

"Maybe he'll blow a transistor," Henry mused, then laughed audibly as he visualized the look on Alice's face when she saw smoke coming from Junior's ears.

It was difficult on the following

morning for Henry to assume the duties of a routine holiday, but he knew that, if he didn't, Alice might get suspicious. He took the rake from the garage and began raking up the leaves that were falling more and more every day.

He glanced at his watch: 12:20! Alice would be leaving any minute now for the Woman's Club and that bunch of cackling hens she played cards with every week. He had no sooner checked the time, when the door opened and Alice came rapidly out, fastening her coat around her.

"Marguerite is picking me up any minute," she said as she crossed to him. "Now, don't forget to light a fire under the pressure cooker about 5:30, and you can peel about four potatoes and have them ready when I get home, and put them in a pot of water with some salt or they'll turn black."

"Yes, dear," Henry said meekly, but this time the meekness was only pretended. Inside, he was glowing with a superior strength, and only the knowledge that this would be the last time he'd ever see her again kept him from retorting.

A car pulled up to the curb. Henry turned toward the car and waved to the fat woman inside as Alice moved quickly toward the passenger side.

"And don't forget to do the

shopping," Alice said while getting into the car. "No sense in making Marguerite go out of her way to pick me up if you're not going to use the car to do the shopping." She slammed the door shut. "The list and the money is on the kitchen table. See if you can get it *right* this time!"

Henry was about to answer her, but when he saw the window going up, he knew she couldn't hear him. He merely mouthed "Drop dead!", knowing that the smile on his face would prevent her from reading his lips.

The car started moving into the street and Henry was alone. He leaned on the rake for a moment, then turned toward the garage.

Soon, dressed in a new serge suit Alice did not know he had bought, his luggage packed neatly in the trunk of the car, Henry was driving carefully toward 117 N. Pike Street.

Henry, Junior was ready as promised, and Henry was astounded at the first sight of him. It was as though he were looking into a full length mirror at his own reflection. When Junior spoke, it was like hearing himself. And when Junior moved and walked, it was like watching himself in a home movie.

Mr. Carlson at Humanoids, Inc., seemed as pleased with the result as

Henry, and he was even more pleased when Henry gave him a check for \$3,500.

As Henry stood in awe of the creation, Mr. Carlson turned to his secretary, who had stepped quietly up to him, and handed her the check. "Take care of this, please, Miss Pilcher."

"Yes, sir." The girl took the check and headed toward the door to the inner office.

Carlson turned back to Henry. "Pleased, Mr. Bennett?"

"Oh, yes . . . yes . . ." Henry stammered. "He's . . . he's *much* more than I had expected. It's . . . it's . . . unbelievable!"

"I knew you'd like him," Carlson beamed benignly, almost paternally.

Henry finally tore his eyes away from his duplicate and addressed Carlson. "Can I take him home with me now?"

"Certainly!" Carlson gushed, "Miss Pilcher will be back with your receipt and guarantee in a moment."

At which point Miss Pilcher suddenly appeared from the office and crossed hurriedly to Mr. Carlson. Henry didn't catch what she said, because her voice was low and, it seemed to Henry, a trifle agitated. When she had finished, she made a hasty retreat into the confines of the office and closed the door.

Carlson turned toward Henry. "Mr. Bennett . . ." he began. He cleared his throat as if searching for the right words.

"Is something wrong?" Henry asked.

Carlson's chest puffed out like a pouter pidgeon. "The amount of the check, sir. You made it out for \$3,500."

Henry was puzzled. "Well, isn't that right?"

Carlson smiled. "Not exactly. The amount should have been \$5,500. You see, that includes . . ."

Henry was furious. "This is outrageous! You quoted me \$3,500. And that's all I'm going to pay!"

"You don't understand, Mr. Bennett."

"I understand, all right," Henry cut in. "You're trying to clip me for an extra \$2,000. I don't have

that kind of money—I'd have to cash in my securities to meet that price!"

"You mean Snow Flake Mining and Morganthau Uranium?" Carlson asked quietly.

Henry's astonishment was second only to the strange uneasiness he felt in his stomach.

"Yes . . . but how did you know?"

"That's what I've been trying to tell you," Carlson said in exasperation. "That's what was used as the down payment on Model 54738—there's still \$2,000 due on it."

"What's Model 54738?" Henry asked, the feeling in his stomach growing.

"Model 54738," Carlson replied smoothly, "is the replica we made of your wife . . . last April."



*Dear Fans:*

*Here are the particulars about the Alfred Hitchcock Fan Club:*

*Membership dues are fifty cents which covers mailing costs and handling. (Please send coins or money orders, no stamps.) For this you will receive an autographed photo of Mr. Hitchcock, his biography, and a bulletin of current news, which will be issued four times a year. You can't imagine how rewarding it is to hear from so many loyal readers, and active, and incoming Fan Club members. I want to thank all of you for your enthusiastic interest.*

*Most sincerely,  
Pat Hitchcock  
Tarzana, California*

*P. O. Box 434*

*One generally invests in insurance as security for his loved ones; however, greed may induce the hallucination that it is a lottery wherein a fortune lies.*

**M**AURICE OWEN sat alone in the livingroom of his home, the drapes drawn, dulling the room's brightness with dark shadows. He leaned back in the reclining chair and thought. It had been perfect. He

knew it had been perfect because he possessed the absolutely indispensable characteristic necessary to execute such a plan. And the characteristic was *patience*.

Maurice admitted that the insur-



ance company had been slow about making a final settlement, but he was safe, perfectly safe. He let his mind go over those critical hours, partly to assure himself and partly to please himself, because in addition to being patient, Maurice was gratified by his own cleverness.

He had taken the insurance policy on Norma, his wife, and his three children. He remembered discussing the policy with Abe Burroughs, the salesman, an old family friend.

"I'd like to have at least fifty thousand on them," Maurice had said.

Abe had appeared pleased at first, then his stubby fingers tapped the papers on his desk thoughtfully. Maurice watched him tapping. Abe was not a patient man. He was nervous and anxious. "That's quite a bit," Abe said slowly.

"I want to be covered," Maurice insisted.

"I was thinking, Maurice . . . you know the premiums on that much insurance run pretty high."

"So?"

"So . . . well, Maurice, do you think you can afford that much?"

"I'll just have to afford it. I want to be covered. You know how well I am insured myself. If I were killed, my wife would never have to lift a finger. She's taken care of.

So I want to give myself the same protection. If something happened to my wife, I'd have the children to raise. I'd have to hire somebody to care for them. It's only good sense."

"Yes, I agree," Abe said, trying painfully to make his point, "but I was thinking about your salary."

"Well, after all, Abe," Maurice said, feigning offense.

"I'm sorry. If we weren't such good friends, it would be easier. The truth is, Maurice, you can't afford to make payments like that. They are too high."

Maurice laughed, a dry bitter laugh. "I thought *you* were the salesman," he said.

Abe colored about the neck. "Sure . . . but if you take on too heavy a load and fail to pay a premium, where does that leave you?"

"Don't worry about the payments, Abe. I know my budget. I wouldn't try something I couldn't handle. Just write the fifty thousand and I'll meet the premiums."

Abe shrugged, his conscience apparently relieved.

The months passed. Nobody would ever know how hard it had been to keep up those payments. He planned to make them for at least six months before he took care of Norma and the children.

It was a tight squeeze, but finally he made it, and without a penny to

spare. Seven months. Seven long, patient months!

Then Maurice had looked for a way to do it. It had to be perfect. At last he hit upon the scheme. He thought it over carefully, analyzing each detail. Then he made his play.

Maurice got his last one hundred dollars together and gave it to Norma. He told her to take a trip to Oklahoma City and do some shopping. He told her he'd managed to save some money and he wanted her to dress up. Maurice remembered Norma's face when he told her. She was delighted, unable to conceal her excitement. One hundred bucks wouldn't buy much up there, but it would buy a dress, and something for the kids.

"Make a day of it," Maurice said. "Take the kids with you and look around. I'll make reservations at a motel I know about. You can spend the night and come back the next day, or whenever you're broke."

"Maybe Margaret would like to go," Norma suggested. Margaret Thomas was their neighbor. Maurice had to be careful. He thought about it a moment.

"Sure," he said, "why don't you ask her?"

Norma had asked Margaret, but the neighbor couldn't get away. So Maurice called a cab that morning, kissed his wife at the cab in view of

the neighbors, hugged each of his three children. Maurice did not see them alive again.

As soon as the bus left, Maurice called the store and told the personnel manager that he had a terrible chill and was going to the doctor's office to get some medicine.

Maurice went to the doctor. He complained of an ache in the small of his back, a general feeling of weakness, hot and cold flashes. The doctor recorded that Maurice had no temperature. Maurice rubbed his head and sighed. "I guess I'll try to go on to work."

"I wouldn't," the doctor said. "The fever will probably come in a few hours. It's a virus that acts this way. I'm giving you a prescription and sending you home. And don't leave the house until this breaks up. You call me if you don't feel better."

"But my job . . ." Maurice said. "I'll have the nurse call your boss."

"Thanks," Maurice said smiling. "That will help."

Dutifully Maurice filled the prescription and went home. He stayed inside all day, answering the phone twice. One call was from his boss. The other was a check-up by the doctor's nurse.

When it was dark, Maurice opened the garage doors, backed

the car out quietly, then closed the doors. He drove to a station at the outskirts of town. There he had the tank filled with gasoline and had the oil changed when the attendant told him the oil was low and dirty. Maurice drank a coke inside the station while the car was being serviced.

The car ready, Maurice drove to Oklahoma City. It was late when he arrived. He knew the motel unit his wife occupied, because he had made the reservation himself. Maurice parked the car and crept to the rear of the motel carrying two small tins of lighter fluid.

He pressed his head against the wall. He heard no sound. Then he carefully poured the fluid, not only on the unit occupied by his family, but along the entire side of the motel. Maurice used his cigarette lighter to start the blaze. He crept away, careful to make no footprints.

When he reached his car, the flames were almost to the roof of the wooden structure. He heard no screams. Inside, the occupants slept. It had been perfect. When the alarm was sounded, it would be too late. Maurice climbed into his car and drove carefully back to the small town in southwest Oklahoma.

It was almost three hours later when he arrived. He turned off the

lights of the car and rolled down the drive. After he opened the garage doors, he eased the car into the garage. He closed the doors quietly and went into the house. Carefully he put away his clothes and went to bed.

It was nearly dawn when the telephone rang. Maurice was lying awake, smoking a cigarette. He let the phone ring seven times before he answered. He spoke as though he had been sleeping. "Hello."

"This is Oklahoma City Police Department calling Mr. Maurice Owen, please."

"Yes," Maurice brightened, "this is Mr. Owen."

"Mr. Owen," the voice said soberly, "this is Captain Parker. I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you."

"Bad news . . . has something happened?" he cried.

"Your wife and children were burned to death early this morning in a motel fire. We have just made identification."

"No," Maurice screamed.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Owen. There wasn't a chance."

Maurice wept skillfully, and perhaps he really did weep. It had been a long and exhausting ordeal. Now it was over.

Local people had come, in great bee-like swarms, clamoring over him, spreading small town com-



fort upon him, easing his great loss. His boss told him to take his time, not to set a date to come back to work.

The eyes of sympathy were upon him. The grocer refused payment for a delivery of food. They were like that in a small town.

And now Maurice's wife had been in her grave for nearly two weeks. All that remained was the insurance settlement. So perfect. So very perfect. *Patience*, that was it. Maurice pitied the stupidity of the petty thieves, the crude armed robbery attempts. All of them so childishly immature. You did it once. Only once, and you got all you needed. Then you retired. One big job. Maurice smiled and poured himself a small drink.

He heard the car outside and moved to the window. A cab was stopped in front of the house. He saw a man in a brown suit and matching hat inside the window. When the man paid the driver, he turned toward the house. It was Abe Burroughs. *The payoff*. Maurice watched from the window as Abe came up the porch steps. He heard the knock.

Maurice opened the door. He kept his voice soft, as though drained of all life, all desire to live. "Come in, Abe," he said.

He watched Abe cross the room, then he closed the door.

"I'm a mess," he said. "I haven't been out since . . ."

"I understand," Abe said.

Maurice rubbed his jaw, felt the growth of beard and looked apologetically at the little man in the brown suit.

"You know, of course, that I'm sorry this happened. As a friend, I mean," Abe said.

*Sure, you little jerk. You're sorry because your company got took for fifty grand. You're so sorry you could cry.*

"Yes . . . thanks," Maurice said softly.

"Do you know how it happened? I mean the details?" Abe asked.

"No. . . . I read the newspapers. It just said that the place started to burn sometime in the night and that everybody got out but . . ."

"That's right. That's what puzzled us. Apparently the fire started in your wife's unit. But she didn't smoke and the place was heated by a large unit that controlled the entire wing. We couldn't find any cause to start the fire. No oily rags, no open flame . . . it's difficult to figure how it started."

Maurice studied the little man carefully. Abe was trying to say something. They damned sure hadn't found anything. If they had,

they'd have sent the police, not the insurance adjustor. But the company wasn't happy the way it happened. Too bad. They couldn't prove a thing. They were smart, maybe, but not that smart, and not that patient, Maurice thought, as he watched the nervous tapping of Abe's finger on the arm of the chair.

"Did the children play with matches?" Abe asked.

"No . . . we were always careful about that. Besides, the paper said the fire started somewhere around midnight. What would they be doing playing with matches at that hour? And if they were awake, they could have escaped." Maurice closed his mouth. He felt his heart beating in his chest, an almost painful throbbing. Was he saying too much? Was he trying too hard to make it appear an accident? He couldn't afford to do that.

"All I know is that my world ended in that fire," he said, switching the conversation to an emotional level, escaping the factual analysis.

"Yes. . . ." Abe said. "It was a tragedy."

Maurice watched the little man's eyes. They were shifting as if on bearings. Abe suspected something, but he didn't have a thing to grasp. Maurice knew that all his

financial dealings had been already checked to determine if he were in debt, which he wasn't.

And now, with every possible angle checked, Abe was there to give in, admitting that they could find no wrong, but bearing an attitude suggesting that although they found no evidence, they were not satisfied. They were going to give him the money, but they wanted him to know that they weren't happy and they wanted him to know also that they hoped he'd choke on that wad of cash. *Settle down. Just be patient a little while longer.*

"The doctor said you had the flu before the fire. You feeling all right now?" Abe asked.

"Yes. Life goes on, I guess," Maurice said.

"What will you do now, Maurice?" Abe asked, his eyes probing.

"Go back to work. What else?" Maurice answered. *You dummy. You didn't think I'd be stupid enough to throw a big spree, did you? No. I'll be back at the men's store for another six months. I'll be around letting people feel sorry for me. There will be a few widows rubbing against me in the store, looking ready and available, but I won't be interested. Then, when it's all but forgotten, I'll leave town quietly. Me and my fifty grand.*

"I see," Abe said.

"This is my home," Maurice said, "and that's my job. There's nothing else to do but go back to work."

Abe shrugged. "Well . . . you know I'm sorry. By the way, we have some papers to sign downtown. Do you feel like coming down?"

Maurice rubbed his face. "I'm a mess, Abe."

"Shave, why don't you. I'll call a cab. The company is ready to settle."

Maurice said, "All right. I'll clean up. We might as well take my car. It's in the garage. Then I can drive home. Might even ride around. I haven't been out since the . . ."

"I understand."

Maurice pitched the keys to Abe. "While I shave, why don't you try to start the car? It might not start. I haven't driven it since the day before Norma and the kids . . ."

Abe took the keys and left. Maurice smiled and sighed. He kept the big word foremost in his mind. *Patience*. He made it.

He lathered his face and scraped the whiskers away. He had nearly finished when Abe came back into the house.

"Did it start?" Maurice asked from the bathroom.

"No. . . . May I use the phone?"  
"Phone?"

"Yeah. . . . I'll get somebody here to look at the car."

"Go ahead," Maurice said.

"That's what happens to them when they aren't driven. When did you say you drove it last?" Abe asked.

"The day before the fire. It's been in the garage all that time. I'll bet it's covered with dust too."

Maurice did not hear Abe answer. He heard Abe's voice speaking into the phone instead.

"Operator . . . give me the police department," Abe said.

Maurice dropped the razor and came into the room frowning. Abe sat in a chair, staring at him indifferently. "Police?" Maurice asked.

"That's right, Maurice."

"Have some kids been fooling around with the car?"

Abe did not answer him. He began to talk into the phone. "This is Abe Burroughs," he said, "and I'm at 912 North Live Oak at the residence of Maurice Owen. I think you had better send a patrol car out here for Owen. Suspicion of murder. I've been investigating for an insurance company." Abe hung up the phone. "They'll be here in a few minutes. Why don't you sit down, Maurice?"

"Abe, are you crazy?"

"I don't think so."

Maurice was breathless, unable to believe what he had heard. *Suspi-*

*ction of murder.* It was impossible. "Why do you say a thing like that, Abe? Haven't I been through enough?"

"You want to know?"

"Of course. You can't just go around accusing people . . ."

"All right, Maurice. When I opened the door of the car, I noticed a sticker on the inside of the door recording an oil change. The sticker bears the date that your wife and children died in the fire. It also records the reading on the speedometer at the time the oil was changed. The present reading shows that the car has been driven three hundred and fifteen miles since the oil was changed. How did that reading change if you didn't drive the car since the day before your wife's death? Can you tell me that?"

"No—I can't tell you. There's no lock on the garage. The car could have been taken."

"But you were here all the time. You would have noticed."

"Not if I was asleep. I forgot about changing the oil. I did do that, but I didn't drive the car anywhere but back here."

"Do you know how far it is to

Oklahoma City?" Abe persisted.

Maurice shrugged uncomfortably. "No—I've never thought about it."

"It's one hundred and fifty-three miles. A round trip would come to three hundred and six miles. That's getting close."

"Abe . . . Abe, are you trying to accuse me of murder on that?"

"Yes."

Something in that inflexible voice jabbed terror through Maurice. In spite of himself, his voice was shrill.

"But I was home sick! The doctor will tell you—"

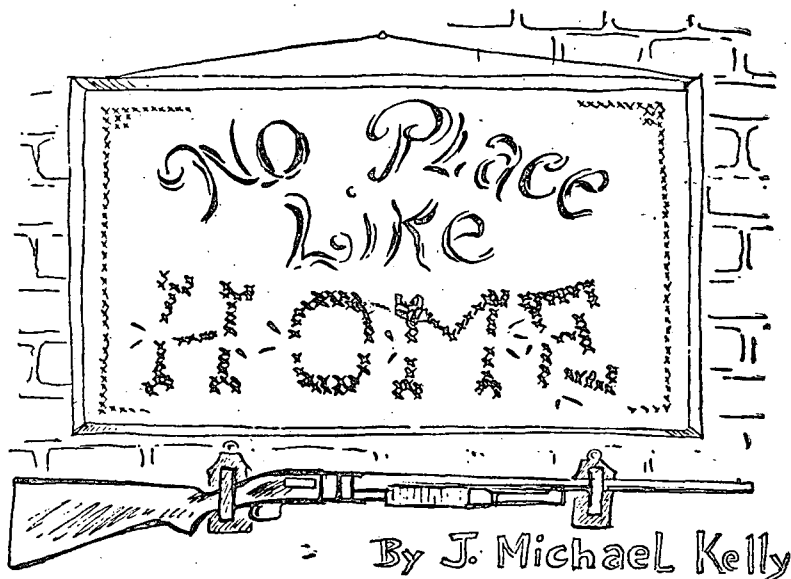
Abe cut in softly. "The doctor told us. So did Margaret Thomas, your neighbor. When she saw you come home from work early, she guessed you were sick. And with Norma away, she did the neighborly thing and came over that evening to see what she could do for you."

Abe didn't need to spell it out. Margaret would have come through the back door that they never locked . . .

Maurice was a patient man, but the police wouldn't keep him waiting.



*Accidents are compounded from conflicting elements, and often the most explosive discord emerges from the psychological ambiguity emanating from a connubial exigency.*



CLARA STRICKLAND swung her blue car off the highway and onto the white sand of the entrance drive. Stopping abruptly in front of her low, white, board and batten home, she ground the gears a little getting into reverse. Craning her plump neck out of the window to avoid the ancient, moss draped live oak on the far side of the drive, she negotiated a tight turn and inched backward toward

the unadorned front door of the house. Only when the bumper scraped the brick steps did she set the brake.

Slipping out from under the wheel, she moved quickly to the trunk and began struggling with a bulky, blanket-encased object which proved to be several inches longer than her own five feet four inch height. Dragging her elongated bundle gingerly onto the

porch, she encountered some trouble with the screen door, but the inner door was easier, and Clara sighed with relief as she kicked it shut. She rested with her shrouded burden propped upright against the wall.

She was still catching her breath when she realized that she was not alone. A quick glance over her shoulder found the half-hooded but watchful brown eyes of Duke, a massive black Labrador retriever. The dog was watching her, but his master was not.

Ernst Strickland, her husband, sat on the red Moroccan hassock with a shotgun across his knees and a cleaning kit open on the floor beside him. When thus occupied, he seldom looked up. Hunting was a great passion with him, and the care of his guns he considered a proper part of it.

Clara was annoyed. She did not like dogs in the livingroom. In fact, she did not like dogs at all. But she had bagged her prize, and she wanted to show it. Her fingers itched to snatch off the twine and uncover it with a flourish.

She said, "I'm home."

Ernst grunted and glanced up. His eyes flickered over the imposing parcel and back down to his cleaning rod.

Clara looked at Ernst sitting there with the overhead light shin-

ing down on his silver hair and tanned forehead. Even at fifty-eight he was a fine figure of a man, handsome in his plaid shirt, khaki trousers and loafers. He was all a woman could ask for: intelligent, charming, and well-equipped with both income and leisure.

You're all a woman could want, she thought, except for one thing. You've got no soul. Down deep inside, Ernst, you're as insensitive as those wooden ducks you're forever redecorating.

No matter how long she was gone, no matter how grand the prize, he only glanced and grunted. He didn't complain—at least, not often. He just ignored. The research, the bargaining, the wheedling, meant nothing to him. He didn't even try to understand the fever that sent her out again and again looking, hoping, yearning.

Clara cut off the old familiar train of thought. She set her teeth and, without even bothering to remove her coat, hauled her burden in terse silence through the livingroom and into the adjoining den. There she paused to catch her breath, then tugged it grimly to the rear of the house and into her workshop.

In the workshop, she laid her cumbersome parcel gently on the floor and took off her coat. Then she unwrapped it. As the light fell

full upon it, she stepped back and gripped her hands across her ample bosom. The hard lines in her features softened. After all these years, she had found *the* shaving stand.

The stand was a marvel, and age was only a part of it. The three distinctly irregular mirrors were surely cut from some earlier piece and were, without a doubt, pre-colonial French. The balancing marble stands, each quite different from the others, had been selected to blend with the woods encasing them. And the wood itself was almost a study in early American carpentry. Here, discovered in a ramshackle mountain cabin and bought for a song, was the work of some unknown genius with the inspiration and skill to collect and fashion a work, not only reflecting eighteenth century colonial craftsmanship at its best, but pointing back to even earlier periods, for the mirrors were certainly antiques at the moment of their incorporation.

A missing foot repaired, some refinishing, an acid bath cleaning on the marble, and it would ring down the curtain at any antique show in the Southeast. Clara felt her eyes moisten at the thought of the long history of the piece, and her heart skipped a beat in anticipation of showing it to some

of the ambitious local collectors.

"Any chance for supper tonight?" Ernst's voice came rumbling into the workshop and broke the spell.

"I'm going to be busy tonight. Why don't you run out and grab a steak?"

Clara didn't hear Ernst's *damn*, but she didn't have to. She knew Ernst and she knew that soft but emphatic comment from long experience. She did hear the door slam and hoped that her husband had taken the dog along.

Clara tried to recapture her mood, but she couldn't. The frustration had settled in once more. She tried to shake it as she wandered into the den looking for a place to display her prize after she refinished it. But the dissatisfaction increased as she realized that all of the good spots were already filled. She would have to move something, and then she would be left with the problem of where to put the thing she had moved.

*This house is just wrong. Too much like a hunting lodge. Even with the new room and the workshop, it's still makeshift. A big house, with high ceilings, remodeled and restored . . .* It was a favorite dream with her. *A place where antiques fit without cramming.*

Clara remembered the old farm-

house in the Shenandoah Valley and the big gray stone place they had looked at outside of Asheville. Once again she realized how she despised her home. And she despised Ernst for making her live in it. With their income, they could live anywhere they chose. But, no, he had to come down here because the hunting was better.

So they had sat in the muggy low country weather just out of Beaufort, South Carolina, while he hunted deer and duck and quail, and let his smelly retriever wander through the house while his pair of pointers yipped and yowled in the backyard.

Worst of all, there weren't any antiques to be found. Too many snoopers. Marine wives wandering around while their husbands were on duty at Parris Island. She hadn't made a decent local find the whole time they had been here. The shaving stand was no exception. It took a trip clear up into the mountains of North Carolina to find it. The thought of other treasures just lying about up there nearly drove her to distraction.

She wandered back into the workshop and stood there, struck once more by the rare beauty and poignant history of the stand which had managed to survive so long amid the insults and abuses of the ignorant and the insensitive.

For a moment she wondered if even Ernst might be captured by its . . .

"No, he won't make jokes about you! I won't let him!" The muscles in her jaw tightened for a moment.

Clara stepped into the living-room and took down the Winchester Pump. It was the shotgun that Ernst had been working on, and that meant it was the one he would be using when he went out after duck in the morning. Carrying it into her workshop, she laid it carefully on the littered table and picked up a large can of plastic wood. A second trip into the livingroom produced the ramrod. It required only a few minutes to pack a generous portion of the yellowish goo securely into the barrel and return both rod and weapon to their customary places.

Whatever had once been theirs, Ernst had worn out with his insensitivity to the deep needs of her soul. To hold her in a place she hated, to torment her with the smell of dogs and gun oil was bad enough but to scorn her love of the old and the beautiful. . . . She thought of the jokes he had made, and knew that she was doing what had to be done.

Over coffee the next morning, she reviewed the thing. Ernst had left before dawn to hunt alone.



He would go by boat into the black coldness of the marshy backwater. The plastic wood would have set, and the high powered shell ought to. . . . With his standing in a floating blind to fire, certainly the gun—and maybe Ernst too—would go over the side and sink.

Even if the gun was somehow found. . . . She got up, took a couple of shotguns and the cleaning kit down from the walnut rack and out into her workshop. She set them on her work table and opened the can of plastic wood. Guns, rod and open can lay there together.

*If worse comes to worst, it might still look like an accident.*

She was glad she had wiped the gun clean of fingerprints. It occurred to her also that it might be wise to call Harriet and check on the time—just in case it ever came to that.

The chat with Harriet was pleasant and her calmness rather amazed Clara. She'd never imagined herself to be made of such steady stuff. Nor had she imagined in advance the sense of relief that came with the idea that she was forever rid of "Mighty Nimrod Strickland". Pleasant visions rose up of a restored farmhouse in the valley in Virginia with large rooms and high ceilings and fellow col-

lectors coming and going. She was still in the midst of these appealing premonitions when Ernst walked into the kitchen.

Clara's lungs seemed to collapse like punctured balloons. She struggled to inflate them as she stared first into her husband's gray eyes, and then down at the gun dangling in his left hand.

"Do you know," Ernst asked, propping the gun in a corner and dropping onto the stool across the counter from her, "what happened to me today?"

"I . . . No. I . . ."

"After all these months of working that same hole, the current decided that it was stronger than my weights and pulled the whole blessed set of decoys right on out and down the river. Hundreds of ducks and not one damn shot!" He came out of his coat and kicked off his boots. "Any coffee left?"

Clara poured a cup without answering. She was still having trouble with her breathing. Ernst didn't seem to notice. They had long since given up paying much attention to each other except when irritated beyond the point of containment.

Clara left him with his coffee and the morning paper and, hurriedly dressing, slipped out the back door. She wanted time to

collect herself. She felt rattled and afraid and disappointed and, for the first time, a little guilty. She wasn't sure that she had the stomach for sitting it out a second time.

Ernst was asleep when she got home. The gun still stood in the corner and the boots still lay on the floor where he had dropped them that morning. Looking at the ominous silhouette of wood and metal, she made her decision. She would tell him the whole story and ask for a divorce. It was not pity, nor any essential change of heart. It was just that she had lost confidence in her ability to murder him.

An hour later, as Clara was working busily in the shop and planning for the confrontation, she heard Ernst's car start. She ran to the door but was too late. Thoroughly disgusted with herself for having let him slip out before she could settle matters, she glared at the red hassock and resigned herself to waiting.

At seven, Ernst was still not back. She called Harriet and canceled out on the bridge club, pleading allergy trouble.

It was eight-fifteen when she heard the sound of Ernst's big station wagon pulling up to the back door. As he walked through the kitchen, she rehearsed her open-

ing statement. She watched Ernst stop in the doorway and look down at her. He grinned.

"Well, I'm glad to see you. I thought you were going to Harriet's."

Clara was disconcerted by the grin. Ernst didn't normally grin at her, and it had been a long time since he had said he was glad to see her. "I canceled out. I didn't feel up to it. I wanted to talk to you anyway, and I missed you this afternoon . . ."

Ernst kept on grinning as he said, "I hadn't really expected to talk to you tonight, but I'm glad I can. It's much better this way."

"You wanted to talk to me?" Clara felt uneasy.

"Yes," Ernst said over his shoulder as he stepped back into the kitchen. "It's a little matter about a shotgun."

Clara opened her mouth but nothing came out. Telling him was one thing, but being found out was another. She watched him walk over to the hassock with the gun hanging naturally in the crook of his arm. "Ernst, I . . ."

Ernst looked at her with a trace of grim amusement at the corners of his mouth, but his eyes were narrowed and cloudy. "I just wanted you to know how I felt about it."

"I know how you must feel, and

I . . .” But she was interrupted.

“*Know*. How could you know? You’re too busy with your precious pile of junk to know anything. Chairs you can’t sit on, tables you can’t eat on, I’m sick to death of it. I’ve smelled old dust ’til I can’t stand it.”

“Ernst!”

You go around moaning about my having old Duke in the living-room. Did it ever occur to you that you’ve thrown every one of my trophies out of the den and turned it into a junk dealer’s dream? A new room is not enough. A new room and a workshop is not enough. It’s got to be the new room *and* the workshop *and* the den *and* the hall—*and then* you whine because I make my last stand squatting on a hassock in the middle of the living-room floor!

“You’ve got so much turpentine on the brain that you’ve forgotten the one antique around here that really counts, the one that pays the bills. I refer, my dear, to your long-suffering, fed-up, antiquated husband who’s going to clean house, make a big bonfire, hang deer heads on the walls, and have dogs all over the damn place just as soon as he gets one detail out of the way.”

“Ernst, I . . .”

“I’m going to kill you, Clara,

love. Gonna put a load of shot right through you at close range—and I’m going to live to enjoy cleaning house after I do it.”

Clara watched the gun swing up and level. It seemed to move so slowly. Her brain seemed to move with it, ever so slowly. It couldn’t be real, and yet the horror came pounding home with every beat of the throbbing pulse in her throat.

“Ernst, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to . . . Really, I was going to tell you . . .”

“Don’t be pathetic, Clara. What were you going to tell me? That you were going to quit dragging in old relics and start acting like a wife? Or were you going to tell me that you’ve decided to take up duck hunting with me, like you used to in those far off honeymoon days before you found your real true love?”

Suddenly it dawned on Clara that Ernst did not know about the gun at all. It was not vengeance.

*He’s killing me for the same reason I tried to kill him.*

Ernst rose and backed toward the kitchen door.

“You can’t!” she choked out as she struggled to her feet. “You don’t understand!”

“I understand,” he said covering her as she rose. “But you don’t. And it’s too late for long

explanations." His voice was calm.

"It won't work, Ernst, I . . ."

"Oh, yes it will," he broke in. "Better than I expected. I planned to do it later tonight and explain that I mistook you for a prowler, but this way is even better. You aren't even supposed to be here. You're supposed to be at Harriet's. So I come home, hear a noise, pick up a gun and snap shoot. Too late I discover that it is my beloved wife, over whom I shall try to grieve appropriately"

"Ernst, listen to me! It's about the gun. . . ."

"Oh, yes, the gun. Well, I've been telling folks for weeks that we've had a prowler and that I'm keeping my gun handy. Don't you think that's real foresight?"

"I *fixed* the gun," Clara heard herself screaming, "*I clogged it, I fouled it, I put plastic wood in the barrel!*"

She saw a shadow of hesitation register and watched his eyes drop down toward the gun, then he smiled. "Clara, you amaze me. That is positively as ingenious a stall as I ever heard. Very good. Very good, but why would you want to plug my gun?"

"*I wanted to kill you!*" she sobbed. "Don't you see?"

"Well, that makes the feeling quite mutual." His affected jauntiness made it clear that he did not

believe her, would only ignore her.

Clara watched the familiar bronzed finger curl and tighten around the trigger. It seemed so slow. Fear and fascination paralyzed her and time seemed to gear itself down to an almost imperceptible movement. Even as she brought up her hands in an instinctive gesture of defense, they seemed to come floating up, drawn by some external force.

The spell was broken by the pain and the scream. Clara never knew whether it was her scream or his, and she never recalled the sound of the gun at all. The memory of the pain and the scream, his or hers or theirs, was the only thing she carried with her during the long days in the hospital.

She did not die. Only her hands were permanently ruined. They had been rendered useless by fragments of metal and plastic. Neither did Ernst die. His face and neck were heavily scarred, but the only permanent loss was his eyesight. For both of them there were weeks of hospitalization and, of course, questions from the police.

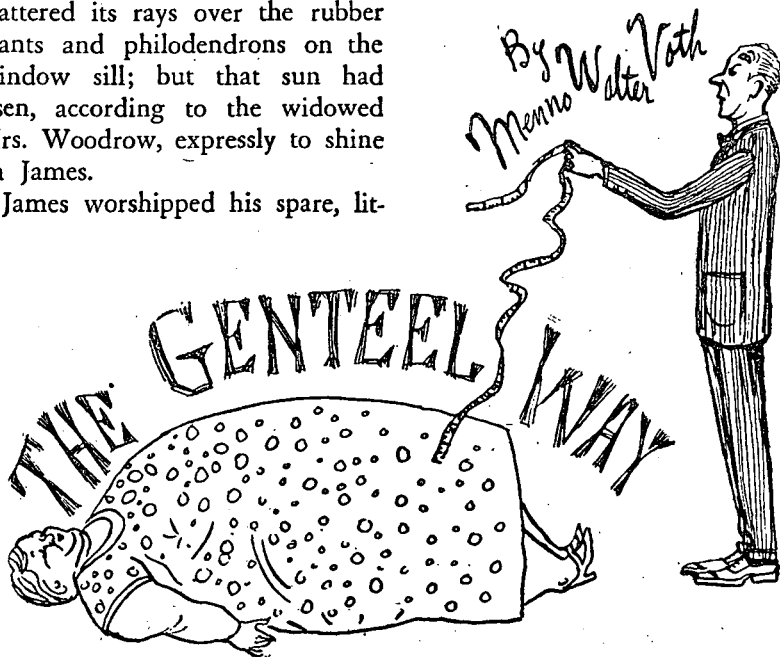
The final decision was long in coming. But eventually the investigators agreed that no one would foul a gun and then fire it. Just as certainly, no one would foul a gun and then stand in front of it. So it had to be an accident.

*Remember when the childhood retort, 'tit-for-tat', accompanied acts of revenge? Similarly, this familiar expression might seem applicable here.*

JAMES WOODROW (no one called him Jim) lived with his mother in a four room suite on Madison Avenue. Here, on the ninth floor of their ten story apartment house, the winter sun always penetrated. The building, from the eighth floor upward, rose quietly and proudly beyond the reach of lesser, newer neighbors. Through the narrow windows, the sun benignly scattered its rays over the rubber plants and philodendrons on the window sill; but that sun had risen, according to the widowed Mrs. Woodrow, expressly to shine on James.

James worshipped his spare, lit-

tle mother and she saw to his tea, his tailor, his tutor, and his tonsils. They spoke very little because, by the time James was in his sixth year, the mother had taught the son all there was to know about being a gentleman and, since this art composes all of the exigencies of life, there was really nothing left to say. Every morning when James left at eleven for a constitutional



stroll clockwise around the block, he would pause before drawing his umbrella from the elephant's-foot stand and turn about for his mother's silent appraisal. This was generally forthcoming, the one notable exception being Labor Day of 1937 when she said crisply, "James, the heel of your left shoe is run down."

Thus it was when James was six, when he was sixteen, and when he was sixty-four, at which time he was suddenly bereft of his mother.

The milieu into which James was born did not ask of each other "What does he do?" Being a gentleman was its own occupation. It developed, however, that one of the hazards of this occupation was that, as the old guard died off, younger, insufferable fools barged into society. Mrs. Woodrow apparently had foreseen this onslaught and its consequences, and had it in hand before it erupted. James, at eight, was taught to play the piano, and though he never in his life gave a concert or made a dime at playing, it nonetheless provided a means of saving caste. What does he do? He studies piano.

The big Steinway arrived behind two spans of matched greys. Since it could not be hoisted through the tall narrow windows, a crew of eight strong men edged it through

the wrought iron gates of the house and spent the better part of three days inching it up the stairwell to the ninth floor. It went easily enough through the double doors of the suite. Mrs. Woodrow said, "Thank you," curtly to the crew and immediately set James to practicing the scales.

James proved to be quite adequate on the oversized piano. Often he had breakfast, then lunch, and even dinner served to him at the piano. To some of the newer maids it was a matter of conjecture whether or not he slept in it.

Only twice in his life did James undertake an extended leave from his duty. In both cases his mother gave him her blessing. In his eighteenth year he matriculated at Yale where his honor, charm, self-confidence, and his piano won him the prerequisite number of friends while in attendance. Years later, during the emergency, the army took him away. An aristocrat is not discomposed by war. He returned from this experience with ribbons, a major's oak leaf, one calf full of shrapnel, and the memory of more friends.

Home with mother again, James found, and kept, things exactly as they had been before except that he played the piano for even longer periods of time and with considerable feeling.

War and its austerity of rationing had made but little impression on Mrs. Woodrow. It was the peace which followed that overthrew her.

James, her hero son, was home. James resumed his clockwise constitutionals around the block; James again escorted his mother to Trinity every Sunday; James, with a maid in tow, did the marketing; James played the piano.

In the first summer of the peace, Allied Motors, whose stocks kept Mrs. Woodrow in comfort, announced a new policy. They would henceforth pay dividends annually instead of quarterly. Old Mrs. Woodrow neglected to take note of this letter and James knew nothing about it.

About this time the apartment building changed hands. One Max Essig, a slum landlord in a hurry to get rich, bought the beautiful old uptown house. First, Max raised the rents. Then he dispossessed all tenants in arrears of their rents. Then he charged those remaining for certain 'improvements'.

His first major improvement was a new elevator. The big stairwell had long since been host to a huge, but slow old cage of an elevator. Max wanted a fast new automatic. This would save him the salary of an elevator operator. The big old

gilded birdcage of an elevator came down. Some months later a new elevator, encased in a concrete tower, the walls of which were two feet thick, filled what was lately the route of the big birdcage, and narrowed the magnificent staircase by half.

Meanwhile Max had served an eviction notice to the Woodrows who, due to their stock dividend troubles, were for the first time in their lives short on rent money.

James Woodrow ignored the rude man's threats and went on playing the piano. Then one day, as James was taking an unusually long constitutional clockwise around the block, a horde of carpenters arrived. Before James had returned they had the large sitting room partitioned off, from the long narrow windows to the double doors of the foyer. The cool withering scorn of the thin-lipped Mrs. Woodrow had been to no avail on the ham-handed idiots of the building trades. James returned to find the suite bisected by a strange, unpainted wall not at all amenable to the fretwork of the plaster ceiling. The culprits were gone. A bag of eight penny common nails sat on the highly polished lid of his piano.

James telephoned Max Essig to inform him that he, the landlord, had made a dreadful mistake.

"Mistake!" roared Max. The Woodrows were by now ten days overdue in their rent and, besides, Max wanted half the suite for his own mother.

James, unused to such dreadful people, politely heard out Max's guttural screamings, calmly cradled the telephone and sent for his attorney.

It was finally agreed that, in spite of old Mrs. Woodrow's illness and attachment to the place, James should give Max notice and the Woodrows would find more suitable quarters on Park Avenue.

James by now had sold enough of his considerable Allied stock to lease a new place and to pay Max for the remainder of the lease on the old place. Mrs. Woodrow was still in bed and, indeed, had not uttered one word since the day of those dreadful carpenters.

Movers were called in. The furniture was crated, and most of it already out of the building when one of the men shouted to James,

"Hey, Mac! You'll never get that grand pianer out of here."

When James got over the shock of being called 'Mac', he began to appreciate the situation. James then went downtown to a hardware store, purchased a length of measuring tape, and telephoned Max's office.

When Max arrived, James word-

lessly led him to the piano, measured it from top to bottom, from side to side and once around the middle. Then, still in offended silence, he measured the bisected doorway and handed Max the tape.

Max shrugged his shoulders.

"You simply have to tear down this wall," said James.

"Look, Buster," said Max. "It wouldn't make any difference anyway. That piano won't go down the elevator no ways."

James, honorably ineligible for the plebian struggles of life, stood wide-eyed with disbelief. Max took the tape and began measuring the insides of the new elevator.

"See?" said Max.

James saw. "Now see what you've done," he said.

Max rolled up the tape, tossed it around James Woodrow's neck and zipped away in the new elevator.

James and his mother, naturally, made arrangements to stay in the house, in spite of their cramped quarters.

"James," Mrs. Woodrow said one day, "I am going to die." And she did.

James took to his new and solitary life very well under the circumstances. His friends were not surprised that he was courteous to his new neighbor beyond the new



wall. They expected him to be a gentleman under any circumstances.

But when James visited old Mrs. Essig several times each day to offer his services, some people began to shake their heads in wonder.

"Poor man," they said. "He misses his mother."

There could not have been two persons more dissimilar than old Mrs. Essig and the late Mrs. Woodrow. Mrs. Essig was a jolly old girl, given to obesity and laughter. She loved to cook, but not for herself alone. James was at her table almost every night of the week.

James' attitude was a mystery to Max Essig. But whatever else Max was, he was a very good, if very busy son. Gladly Max shelled out for creamed soups, liver pastes, baked potatoes, sour cream, steaks, caviar and wines by the gross. When, on his rare visits to his mother, he saw that James was at least bringing along the desserts, Max nodded approvingly.

In addition, almost every hour James would send out for eclairs,

cheese cake, pounds of cream-filled chocolates and malted milks for old Mrs. Essig.

This went on for three months, at which time old Mrs. Essig had a heart attack, provoked undoubtedly by her appetite.

Max arrived to see his mother being rolled onto a stretcher by four able-bodied men in white. Nearby was a doctor and a saddened James. Mamma Essig seemed to be breathing her last.

They took her on the stretcher out to the door. There the difficulties commenced. The spirit was still willing, but the flesh had overextended itself. Try and tilt as they might, the men of modern medicine could not knead the surplus volume of flesh through that door. And beyond them, slim and unyielding, there was still that new elevator.

Sadly James unrolled a measuring tape, measured old Mrs. Essig from head to foot, from side to side, once diagonally, and once for depth. Then he made a loose generous coil of the tape and looped it around Max Essig's head.

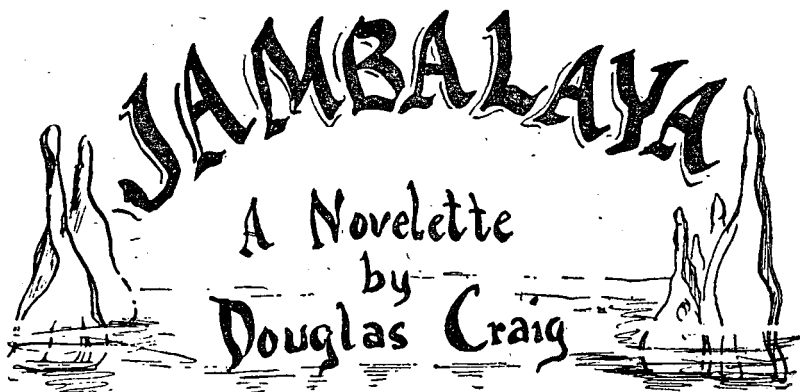




*The "crazy dream that never had an earthly chance of coming true,"—who has eluded it? But violence, let me adjure, may not effect relief from this preoccupation.*

VINCE SAVOY is going to the chair this morning at Angola. That's the way it's got to be, Vince being what he is—an ex-trooper who went bad and brought shame on us all.

We grew up together in the bayous of Louisiana, in the shadow of oak and cypress that drip long gray moss like the tears of the dead. We rassled 'gators and dodged quicksands together, bay-



# JAMBALAYA

A Novelette  
by  
Douglas Craig

I'm no kin to Vince Savoy and I keep telling myself that I've no more pity for him than I'd feel for a mad dog loose in a school yard. And yet, while I sit here waiting for the dawn light to come crawling over the marshes, I'm plagued by the thought that there's somebody else who ought to be going with him. Me.

ing the moon on white nights. Girls were no problem between us in those days, and we got a big laugh out of it when they passed us up for some type in a tin hat, a *texien* from the oil rigs in the Gulf, or a well-heeled tripper from up north. Women, Vince used to say, brought trouble on nobody but themselves.

There were a couple of exceptions though, and the main one was Clo Ronsard. We'd have died for her any time, either one of us. But as things worked out it was worse than that. When I think of the years stretching out ahead of me now, I get sick.

My name is Mike Logan and I'm a trooper myself. What's more, I'm married to a girl that's too good for me. Her name is Felice. No kids yet, maybe never. That's not for me to say now.

It never crossed my mind that Felice would get hurt by anything I ever did. But I think she knew what was wrong with me, long before I was assigned to the Savoy case.

The first hint I had of it was that same night, when it struck me for the first time since my marriage that I didn't feel like going home. I hung around Headquarters until everybody else was gone and then I went over to Ti'Jean's bar and leaned on that for awhile. I didn't get drunk. It just seemed all of a sudden as if life was pretty raw, and I put away a few cherry flips with a bourbon base to kind of improve matters.

But it didn't work. I was in a bad situation, and I knew it.

Vince had dropped out of sight all of a sudden like a gator into its hole, and Headquarters picked on

me to pole him out. I squawked bloody murder, but it stuck and they detailed Dubois to help me, which was no help at all. Dubois is a good kid, you understand, but heavy footed, the kind you don't trust in the swamps with those size 16's of his. When he lifts one up, the other only sinks in deeper.

But my main problem was Clo. To get any kind of line on Vince I'd have to keep an eye on her day and night, and I wasn't sure how that would work out. Not sure at all.

I was well stirred up by the time I stomped out of Ti'Jean's place and up along the bayou to my own house, pulling up short at the foot of the steps to draw a deep breath. Then I went on up and the good smell of simmering gumbo came out to greet me and I felt like a dog.

"Felice—?" I said, "Felice—?"

She came out of the kitchen quickly and quietly, wiping her hands on her pink apron, and held up her cheek for me to kiss, a cool, smooth cheek that smelled of rose water. Homemade rose water, at that. Her eyes were smiling, but she shoved me away gently and said, "You're late, Mike. You must be hungry. Will you eat right now, or would you like a shower first?"

"Shower," I grunted, holding my breath so the blast of bourbon

wouldn't drown out the rose water. I pulled out my gun and parked it on the shelf behind the clock, as usual. "Tough day," I told her, heading for the bedroom door with my shirt half off before I got there. "They've put me on the Savoy case—what d'you think of that?" And then, before she could speak, I whirled around and saw the sudden shocked paleness of her face. "Don't tell me!" I yipped. "I don't want to hear!"

She didn't have to tell me. I could hear the words inside my skull under the roar of the shower in the old tin tub . . . *but Mike, you can't—Vince is your friend . . . and what about Clo?*

Sure, what about Clo? I wanted to know myself. There was a rumor that she'd left Vince. Did that mean she was through with him now, for keeps?

I wasn't proud of the notion. Not just because Vince had been my friend a long time ago—hell, he was nobody's friend these days! And it wasn't only on account of my wife. The thought of Clo was like a fresh wound, the pain of it banked down under the jab of a needle—then wham! It busts loose before you even get to the dressing station. That happened to me in Korea.

I tried to stare myself down in the wavy old mirror over the wash-

basin, but it wasn't easy. I dug out a clean shirt and buttoned it slowly, looking around the shabby little room that Felice had tried to fix up with bright curtains and a bedspread to match and odd bits of furniture that didn't. Shabby was the word, all right. It was a safe bet that Vince Savoy had done better by his woman. But maybe she didn't care where she slept, as long as—

"Mike, are you coming?" Felice called out from the kitchen.

The tone of her voice made me prick up my ears. It sounded different. I remembered suddenly that she never had much to say about the Savoy, one way or another, since they got married, except once. Just once, when she turned to me in the night with a queer little sob and said, "Mike—wait—there's something I want to ask you. Mike—are you still in love with Clo?"

That knocked the breath out of me, but I said something fast and convincing like, "Hell, no—what ever gave you such a crazy idea?"

But she didn't say. Felice is the only woman I ever knew who never had much to say about anything. It could be restful, if you didn't start wondering what was going on inside her head.

"Coming," I called back, and a minute later I was digging into a

dish of gumbo while she brought the coffee pot and a crusty hunk of bread with garlic butter that she'd been keeping hot in the oven. A meal for a king, as usual. "Great stuff, honey," I mumbled. "You never lose the touch."

"As a matter of fact," Felice said coolly, "it isn't very good tonight. Dubois was here awhile ago and I gave him a plate, but he left half of it."

I quit eating. "Dubois?" I said. "What did *he* want?"

"You," said Felice. "He said he'd be back after supper." Her voice had a catch in it.

"Is that all?" I snapped suspiciously. "Did he say anything else?"

She thought about that for a second. "If you mean, did he tell me anything he shouldn't, no," she said. "I think you're too hard on Dubois, Mike. He's young, but he's a good policeman, too."

"Did he—" I was going to ask her if he'd said anything about the Savoy case but I shoved back my plate, instead, and reached for a cup of coffee.

"You see?" Felice said sadly. "It isn't very good. I'm sorry, Mike. I think I'll go and lie down for a little before I wash up. I have a small headache."

"You're not sick?" I asked quickly, but she'd slipped into the

bedroom, closing the door behind her.

It's Clo, I thought. She's heard something about Clo. That dumb ape of a Dubois! But it didn't have to be Dubois. Everybody up and down the bayou knew that the four of us had grown up together, but that things had changed between us. That was enough for the busybodies with the knack of putting two and two together and making five out of it.

Vince and I had married the Ronsard girls, Clothilde and Felice. They were cousins, no kin to either Vince or me, and that's something in our part of the country.

There's no use denying that I'd been in love with Clo as far back as I can remember. But Vince was more her type. She saw him as some kind of hero, like the great old pirate, Jean Lafitte, whose raiding crews used to roam the Gulf, sacking and burning as they went.

Felice was different, the gentle kind, blonde as an angel. She thought the old time pirates were very bloody and sad, poor fellows. What were they, after all, but criminals and lost souls? But you could see the hero worship in Clo's big dark eyes when she looked at Vince. I used to wonder what went on behind those eyes that had come down to her

through a long line of Cajun grandmothers, blazing and sultry by turns, loaded with dreams that she kept to herself.

But I could never see myself in any of those dreams, and Vince was my friend. So I married Felice. I got the best girl in the world, bar none. But Vince got the girl we'd both wanted from the time we found out what wanting was.

Felice and I settled down in a comfortable old house close enough to Headquarters for me to report in any kind of weather, because we have some fast winds down here in the hurricane season. And we were happy. Maybe it wasn't all fire and honey, as the old folks say, but it was good, even when Felice held back a little. She felt that married love had a good deal of sunfulness in it, and that kind of put the damper on sometimes.

I hate to admit it, but I used to ask myself sometimes if a man didn't make a mistake to marry a woman who was so damned *good*. If only she'd leave off braiding her pretty hair into two tight pigtails every night, and maybe sew a bit of ribbon and lacey stuff into her nightgown. But what kind of animal would want to change a good wife into something that was half hussy?

Vince wouldn't settle for a quiet life, no matter how you sliced it. He transferred to one of the new oil-and-shrimp-towns on the Gulf, where things weren't so tame. Clo had the same streak of wildness in her, I guess. She was crazy for the change.

They bought a modern, ranch-type house, all brick and glass, with a TV aerial as tall as an oil derrick, and an outsize freezer that packed the kind of food they liked to eat these days. That freezer really tore it for the folks back home on the bayou, the old time *habitants* who still eat better than any other people in the world, and know it.

There was an ugly rumor that Clo Savoy wouldn't even cook for her husband! Least of all the gumbo and jambalaya that no real man could live without. And her coffee—! It was only a pinch of brown powder that melted away at the touch of hot water! Where were the grounds? The dark, rich, useful grounds that held up the pot on the back of the stove from one day to the next?

Most of it was woman-talk that Felice picked up when she went visiting up and down the bayou, but I kept half an ear cocked, just in case. God forgive me, I was listening for worse, for some hint that the Savoyes weren't getting

along nearly as well as they might.

After while, though, there was another kind of buzz down at Headquarters and I gave both ears to that one.

Vince had always been wild, with a sort of blind courage that drove him into every clip joint and dope den along the coast, and more times than not he got the man he was after. He barged deep into the marshlands on the trail of smugglers and hijackers that lived off the muskrat trappers and raided the payboats that were heavy with dough in a good season.

The trouble was that Vince was a smart money man himself, and they don't last. He started out on the force in a blaze of fireworks, but the show winked out in a smelly smudge of damp powder.

That's when the bad breaks began. And it wasn't the sweating taxpayer who squawked about Vince to Headquarters—it was the crooks!

The first time it was a payroll job. Somebody knocked off an elderly Chinese who made a fortune drying shrimp in the old-fashioned Cantonese way. He couldn't add up to ten without one of those rattling bead counters they call an abacus, and he still payed off his help in silver dollars, the way his grandpa used to do.

One pay day somebody plugged

him in the back of the head and took off with the cash. We never found out for sure who actually pulled the job or how he got rid of the proceeds. Our real headache was who thought it up? The brains behind it, so to speak.

Of course, there weren't any. We tried it for size on all the "known criminals" in the parish, but all we pulled in was a mess of hurt feelings. Nobody, but nobody was going to own up to a corny, hamstrung job like that! Some of the biggest thugs in three states were so shocked and embarrassed professionally that they were ready to tell what they knew. It made quite a story. So simple.

A state trooper had planned this one, they told us. An "amachoor", what else? His name? Sure, sure—his name was Vince Savoy.

It was the laugh of the year that picture of Vince staggering around under a load of hot silver dollars. He laughed himself when he was called down to Headquarters for routine questioning. "Crazy, man—crazy!"

But it started me wondering. The Savoyes were living high off the hog these days, and his pay was the same as my own. How did he do it?

A wealthy shipbuilder was the next to go. No silver cartwheels this time, just green paper curren-



cy, although some of it might be hard to pass. The man had been shot in the back and had fallen forward across his pay table. The stuff must have been soaked with his blood. Nobody tried to pin this on Vince, but the Savoy's came out with a fancy car as long as a deep sea lugger, and I stopped wondering. I knew.

The big surprise came when Vince quit the force of his own accord. The whisper got around that he'd rigged himself up a neat little syndicate, a protection racket based on all he'd discovered while he was in uniform. The slimy roots of it reached up from the muck at the bottom to the top where the politics grow.

Vince was playing pirates for real now, I thought that night, as I paced up and down in front of my house, waiting for Dubois. I wondered how Clo was taking it.

A voice came to me through the half-dark, along with the crunch of heavy boots. "Logan?" This would be Dubois turning up after supper, as promised. "Sorry if I kept you waiting."

"Think nothing of it," I said. "Maybe we could stroll over to Ti'Jean's for a couple of beers." And then, when we were out of range of the bedroom window, I let him have it. "What the hell did you say to my wife?"

"So help me, nothin'!" Dubois yelled like a kicked pup. "I just asked her if she'd seen Clo Savoy since she got back to the bayou—"

"You did, did you?" I snapped. My tongue was thick in my mouth. Clo—back on the bayou with the old folks on their camp boat. Clo skinning muskrats and running the bloody pelts through a wringer, the way she had to when she was a kid. What kind of life was that? In spite of myself, I said gruffly, "What did she say? Felice, I mean."

"Nothin'," Dubois said glumly.

I laughed. "That sounds about right," I said, but when we got to Ti'Jean's place I was still sweating.

Dubois chattered along for awhile over his beer, but I didn't pay him much mind until I heard that name again and I snapped at it. "What's that about Savoy? If you've got any fresh dope, spill it!"

He shook his head. "It's all just say-so. You know."

It was never any more than that. Nobody had ever pinned anything on Vince, and maybe we never would. It wasn't even our job to pick him up unless we caught him standing over a body with a gun in his fist. Knowing Vince, that didn't seem likely. I said so, and Dubois tried to look tough, flattered to be talked to like a grown-up policeman. It was pretty funny

and I was trying to wipe a sour grin off my face when he let drop something that hit a nerve.

"That gal of his," Dubois said, looking wise. "She's mad like hell at him. Maybe she'd talk."

"Clo?" I said. "You're crazy. She'd feed herself to the sharks first!"

"Not her—not Mrs. Savoy!" Dubois cut in. He was shocked. "The other one. That doll he took up with after his wife left him."

There was a queer lurch inside me. Another woman, eh? I'd never heard a breath about another woman. "I don't believe it," I said. "Whoever she is, she's lying."

"He's been seen with her a couple of times," Dubois said hopefully. "But it wasn't long before he gave her the air."

I whistled. That made sense. No other woman could get Clo off his mind. Nobody but Clo could do that. I knew. . . . But this briefing was getting out of hand. I was supposed to be filling in a rookie on a tough new case, and here I was with my head stuck through a sheet while he fired cocoanuts at me.

"Okay," I said, tossing a bill on the bar. "Let's pack it in for tonight. See you in the morning."

"Well, th-thanks—" Dubois mumbled, blinking, and I clapped

him on the shoulder, sorry for catching him off balance. "You'll rack up a medal for this job, kid." I told him. And with that I headed home by myself, thinking sixteen to the dozen. Another woman! Well, well, well. . . .

I wasn't drunk, but I wasn't sober either. I stumbled on the front steps and barged in with a heavier tread than I meant to. I'd forgotten Felice had a headache. But there she was, sitting in her own chair under the lamp, with a pile of mending beside her. She was sewing buttons on a shirt.

I stopped short. My gun was lying on the table next to her.

She looked up at me and bit off a thread. "I think you ought to be more careful, Mike," she said quietly. "You keep forgetting your gun."

That was all, and God knows it wasn't much. I'd always been careless about my gun, and there was more than one crook from the water-prairies who would have jumped at the chance to pick me off unarmed. Felice had a right to be worried, but tonight I took it as a personal insult.

"When I need your advice, I'll ask for it!" I yelled. "And as for that shirt, it's old enough to throw away—I won't wear it!"

She didn't answer. Her face was still pale but while she put the

needle through the hole of a button there was the ghost of a smile on her lips. It took some of the fight out of me. I sat down and started to take off my shoes.

"Well, say something," I growled. "Tell me I'm drunk. Tell me I'm some trooper to be running around in the dark without my gun. Tell me you curse the day you married me—

"All that?" she asked, the needle flashing into a new hole. "It doesn't sound much like me, does it? Besides, it's none of it true."

I kicked my shoes across the room and rested my head on my fists. I knew I ought to come up with some kind of apology for my rough talk, but I didn't feel like it. I felt like staying mad.

"Mike," Felice said softly.

"Yeah?"

"It's Clo, isn't it? It always has been. Oh, Mike, why did you marry me? It must have been hard—hard for you, I mean."

"Woman," I said, when I could speak at all. "You are out of your mind."

But she shook her head. "You know I'm not," she told me.

I opened my mouth to say something, but she beat me to it. "I don't suppose it's ever occurred to you that I might get tired of playing second fiddle—oh, not to anybody else! Not even Clo. Just to

some crazy dream that never had an earthly chance of coming true!"

If there was an answer to that, I didn't know what it was. But I tried. "Since you're talking about Clo," I said, "it's true that I had a bad case on her once—puppy love, I guess you'd call it. But that's long over."

Felice laughed, a thin, silvery sound like ice in a glass. "Oh, Mike, you do try so hard! You're so honest—*policeman* honest—in all the things that don't count! Good night, Mike. I'm going to bed."

She stood up and reached for my gun. I suppose she was going to put it back behind the clock, but I jumped.

"Lay off that!" I barked. "You could hurt yourself with that thing!"

Felice gave it to me, but after she'd gone into the bedroom I sat there holding it, my hands slippery with sweat. I'd better find another place for it, some place she didn't even know about. If she got hurt, I'd never forgive myself—never. I ended up by putting it on a shelf in the china closet, behind the wedding plates we never used, and turned the key in the lock of the glass door.

I was too stirred up to feel like sleeping, so I went out on the *gal-erie* and smoked awhile, looking

up and down the bayou where the lights were winking out one by one. Clo was up there somewhere, living on the campboat with the old people, the way she did when we were kids.

I strolled along the old footpath that was seldom used these days. There was a new paved road lying behind the houses, running all the way from the Gulf. You could make time on that road with a motorcycle or a squad car, but it was just as useful for a fast getaway—

That's what I was thinking when I saw the headlights of a big car that came roaring down toward the coast. I was surprised when it pulled up short and a voice came to me from between two old Cajun houses that were pretty much like my own.

"'Allo, you there—Mike! Mike Logan!"

All the blood in me turned cool and slow, sluggish as the dark stream of the bayou beside me. I'd known it all my life, that voice. It belonged to Vince Savoy.

"'Allo yourself," I said. I didn't have to yell because there he was already, out of the car and coming towards me, tall and thin and swaggering, like the great old pirate Jean Lafitte himself. It was the first I'd seen him in a couple of years.

We didn't shake hands, and somehow that bothered me. There was a little matter of mayhem and murder, sure, and me assigned to tail him from here to hell and back, on account of I was a trooper and he was a crook—but for some reason that didn't stack up very high at the moment. Damn it, I was glad to see him! Still and all, I didn't hold out my hand, and neither did he. Presently the feeling flickered out between us like a tallow candle at the grave of something dead and gone.

"Are you lookin' for me, Mike?" Vince said. His voice sounded light and kind of jeering, like a mocking bird.

"I'm lookin' for you, all right," I said. "But it don't do me much good at the moment. As you very well know."

He laughed. "Man, don't I just! Would I be here if I had fresh blood on my hands?"

"Probably not," I said. "But keep lookin' over your shoulder, boy. I'll be there some day, right behind you."

I couldn't see his face, only the gleam of his strange, light-colored eyes. Maybe he was smiling, but I couldn't prove that either. "Thanks for the tip, Mike. I'll bear it in mind. Where are you headin'?"

"I'm not," I told him. "Just

ramblin' along, lookin' around."

But he seemed to want to toss the ball back and forth, just for kicks. "An evenin' stroll, eh?" Vince said. "For instance, you didn't know that Clo's folks have got their campboat tied up—a short piece from here, up the bayou?"

"What's it to me? I've got nothin' on her either."

"That's right, you haven't," he said thoughtfully. "They've worked her over at Headquarters already. I guess you know that."

"Well, you guess wrong," I snapped. I was getting mad now. "They'd no business doing that. What's she got to do with the crazy way you act?"

"Not a thing," Vince told me smoothly. "They found that out. She made like them three monkeys—no talk, no hear, no see. You know Clo."

"How is Clo?" I said, to be saying something. And there was a long silence between us, heavy as lead.

"I wouldn't know," he said finally. "She won't talk to me. So long, Mike—see you around." And he was heading back to his car before I could speak again. I stood there staring after him and the haze of light and dust that kept getting smaller as he burned up the new road at ninety or more. The fool thought came into my

head that it would be tough luck if he got pulled in for speeding. Then my mind switched back to Clo.

So she wouldn't talk to him. But why would he tell *me* that?

The answer was right there. I couldn't miss it. The four of us had grown up together, he and I, and Clo and Felice. It wouldn't have crossed his mind to lie to me about a personal matter like that. He still believed I was his friend. It doesn't make me feel any better, let me tell you that.

They say there's nothing like an uneasy conscience to turn a man uglier than he is already. I was sure in no mood to go home. I felt stubborn, mean, and I started walking again, only this time I knew where I was going. I'd been assigned to the Savoy case, hadn't I? That meant keeping tabs on the two of them, didn't it? Okay. That's what I was doing.

The old campboat was tied up under a tent of long gray moss that hung down from a big, black cypress. I was standing in the shadow of it when I saw her come out of the deckhouse and look towards me, shielding her eyes against the glare of the deck light.

"Who's there?" she asked sharply.

I went forward, afraid of the change I'd see in her. She was



wearing a green dress cinched in at the waist and a flowery apron over it. Her figure was a little fuller, that's all. Maybe richer is a better word. Her dark hair lifted in the light breeze and blew across her forehead just the way it used to, and her feet were bare.

"Mikel!" she cried, and she sounded glad. "Oh, Mike, it's been such a long time!" She ran to me as I stepped over the low deckrail, but not all the way. I saw the quick color whip into her face as she checked herself. "I came close to hugging you," she told me, smiling. "But that would never do. What would Felice say?"

"Likewise Vince," I said, and the tone of it was none too pleasant. "How're things with you, Clo?"

"As if you didn't know," she said. Her face changed. A look of sadness came over it. "You won't ask me any questions, will you, Mike? They tried that at Headquarters. It didn't work."

"I'm off duty," I said. There was no such thing as being off duty on a case like this, and she knew it, but she let it go by.

"Will you take some coffee, Mike? For old times' sake? The old folks have gone to church, so I'm alone."

"Just a drop, maybe," I said. "Then I'll be on my way."

Well, the busybodies had lied about her coffee. It was hot and strong enough to stand alone. I tossed it off, knowing I'd best get out of there fast. The crazy dream Felice had been talking about wasn't just a dream any more. Clo was near enough now for me to feel the warmth of her and the darkness around us rocked with the sweet smell of oleander. Not far off a bull 'gator bellowed and threshed in the slow water, sending a little scurry of ripples along the side of the boat. Clo shivered, wrapping her arms about herself like a kid that feels cold or scared.

"You know, I'd forgotten—" Clo said softly. "I'd forgotten it was so beautiful back here—and so awful—"

She was scared! It was a real shock to me. I'd seen her mad when we were kids, spitting mad and ready to take out her spite on anybody, the same as Vince. But I'd never seen a look of fear on her face before.

I was so close to reaching for her that I took a step back and hit the deckhouse wall. A kind of rank bitterness welled up in me. "You like it better in Roux City with the neon signs and the juke boxes, eh?" I said. "Well, why don't you go back to him? You won't be seeing much of him when he starts doing time."

"Mike, don't *talk* like that!"

"Like what? I'm up to the nose myself with muskrats and mosquitoes. Maybe I'll give the job a heave and stake myself to a lugger and a stretch of clean salt water. I always thought I had the makings of a jumbo man—"

"Stop—please . . . stop!" She grabbed my arm hard and her small fingers felt like the claws of a bird. "That's the way *he* used to talk! And where did it get us? You and Felice would end up the way we—we—" Her voice broke in a dry little sob. "He's changed so, Mike. You've no idea! But you don't just stop loving people."

"That's a fact," I said. Before I knew it my arm went around her, pulling her close to me, and she buried her face in my shoulder and cried and cried. So help me, there was nothing worse in me at that moment than pity for her.

Finally she pulled away, lifting her apron to mop up the tears. "I'll never go back to him, Mike. But I left everything behind me, all my clothes, everything"—her voice trailed off and I knew that she was thinking about her things too. Women are funny. Even Felice, with that old shirt she kept mending and never could bring herself to throw away.

"Well," I said. "I'll be on my way."

"Don't get mad, Mike," Clo said, very low. "You're sore and unhappy, I know. Honest, I *know*. There's never been anybody but Vince for me, but if there was, if there ever could be. . . ." She stopped.

That was more than I could take.

I grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her until her head fell back and she set her teeth in her lip to keep from crying out. "You can't devil me like that! If it was anybody but him, who would it be—*who*?"

The answer was so soft I hardly caught it. "You, Mike—you."

I let go of her. I knew I'd go crazy if I didn't. But I was past being polite, or even careful. "Suppose he two-timed you? What then?"

She looked as if I'd run a knife into her. "He'd better not," she said quietly. "I'd cut his heart out. The same as he would mine."

I cursed myself for a dumb ox. I'd come close to telling her about the other woman. I was getting as bad as Dubois. But there was one more thing to be said, so I said it. "If I can pin anything on him, Clo, I'll pick him up. But I won't hurt him—not if I can help it."

She nodded without saying anything, and I climbed over the side of the campboat, stepping carefully



over the wet mud so I wouldn't sprawl on my face in front of her.

Then I went on home.

After that night I tried to put Clo out of my mind for good. But she was in my blood. It was worst of all when I was with Felice. There was a kind of wall between us, and it shamed me to find I couldn't beat it.

*You don't just stop loving people*, Clo had said. That's the truth. But there was more to it than that. You don't lie to somebody you love, either, and I loved my wife.

I tried to make it up to her in little ways, like the bunch of store-bought roses I had sent from town for her birthday, and the king-size box of pralines I had shipped over from N.O., and I talked her into spending a few extra bucks on something new and pretty to wear. But I couldn't forget what she'd said that night about "all the things that don't count", and the hurt was there in her eyes, no matter how hard she tried to hide it.

Meanwhile, Vince kept himself out of sight. He didn't need to, as far as Headquarters was concerned. He wasn't even on the "wanted" list. But I was curious. Then the word got around that he'd left the parish altogether and I figured he had some big job lined up and wanted to be far, far away when they pulled it off. As

it turned out, I was right. Vince had a good organization.

It was Dubois who picked up the information that Vince was having himself a time in New Orleans, and that he had taken a woman along with him. No, not Clo. The other one.

"You can't pick him up for that," I said.

"Maybe not, but she's madder than a wet hen," Dubois told me, happy to be in the know. "Savoy gave her the air again. That's twice, now. She's ready to talk."

"Don't make me laugh," I said, burying my nose in a pint of beer. "If that baby had anything on Vince, he wouldn't let her out of his sight."

But Dubois had dreamed up a different angle. "This doll wants to be friendly," he explained. "If anything breaks, she'd be on the side of the law."

"That's the place to be," I said. "Is something going to break?"

"There's one person who might know." Dubois leaned across the bar and scooped himself a handful of boiled shrimp, feeding them into his face slowly, one by one. It made me feel kind of sick.

"Okay," I asked. "Who?"

"Mrs. Savoy," he said, grinning.

I had to hold down my right fist hard to keep from pasting him one. "I told you before, she won't

squawk." But Dubois continued.

"Not even if this other dame gets to her with a lot of stuff about Savoy, personal stuff that only another woman would know?"

"You slimy slug," I said to my trusty sidekick. "You dirty—"

"Hold it!" Dubois gulped down the last shrimp and backed away from me. "This doll hit town an hour ago and I just got through dropping her at the campboat to pay a call on Savoy's wife. What's the harm in that?"

I shoved past him and headed home, sick as a pup. But I still didn't believe it would work. Clo wouldn't talk—I'd have bet my soul on it. She'd find some other way to get even, maybe, but not that!

When I got home I found the place a litter of boxes and white tissue paper and Felice trying on the new stuff she'd bought on a shopping trip to town that afternoon. It looked as if she'd bought out a store, and I almost said so, habit being what it is.

Her eyes were bright and her cheeks pink with excitement as she held the things up in front of her, showing them off to me. There was a real pretty dress with bright flowers all over it, and a yellow one with a big skirt that stood out like a dancing girl's, and she'd had something done to her hair.

It was shorter and curled around her face. She'd bought shoes, and a lot of underwear, some plain, some kind of lacy. I stood there gawking while I felt my face get red and the queer, sick feeling grew in the pit of my stomach. I remembered the times I'd wished she'd do something like this—fix herself up a little, make like life was more worth living—I don't know how to say it even now.

The thing was, it was too late! She looked pretty as a valentine, but nothing stirred in me. Nothing. And she knew it. I suppose a woman always does.

I saw the color drain out of her face and she started folding the things up and tucking them away in the tissue paper without looking at me. "Silly—silly—" I heard her whisper to herself, as if I wasn't even there, and then she went off into the bedroom and put the boxes away on a high shelf in the closet.

"Aren't you going to wear them?" I said gruffly. "Honey—?"

But the bedroom door banged in my face and presently I heard the creak of bedsprings and the muffled sound of her sobbing. But I didn't go and try to comfort her. I knew I'd make a mess of it. Instead I went into the kitchen and broke out the bottle of bourbon we kept for company and went to

work on that, cussin' myself.

That was a long night. I stayed out on the *galerie*, smoking, my head thick with drink and disgust with myself and with Dubois, wondering what had happened on the campboat between Clo and that other woman of Savoy's. I wouldn't have put it past Clo to kill her if the notion took her. Even that didn't seem as bad as Clo there facing up to scolding chatter of the old folks, Clo with her pride smashed, living out her days in the ruins of it. . . . But there didn't seem to be any police action indicated that night, so I finished the bottle.

Next day Headquarters filled me in. Dubois had picked up Savoy's ex-doll, crying, but all in one piece, when Clo put her off the campboat. She was having second thoughts and now she wanted protective custody. She didn't say whether she was scared of Vince or Clo, but we obliged by locking her up. It brightened up the old jailhouse a good deal for a few days. Then we forgot about her.

The fuse had been lit for the biggest bank robbery the state had ever seen; and it blew up right in our faces, vault and all, netting close to two hundred grand. As usual, there wasn't a jot of evidence to connect it with Vince Savoy.

Two cashiers were killed, both women. Likewise the president of the bank, who was seventy-one, and his favorite grandson, aged nine, who was playing checkers with grandpa in the private office at the time. All four were tossed through the plate glass window into the street. It looked like a massacre, which it was.

We were all put to work on it, every trooper that wasn't nailed down, and pretty soon the F.B.I. came swarming in, with press, radio and TV right on their tail.

We put Savoy's ex-dollie over the hurdles once more, but she was a complete washout and we let her go, limp as a dishrag and still whimpering for police protection.

Then it was Clo's turn again. We still didn't have anything on her, or Vince, and when we asked her to stop by Headquarters for a small chat, she came.

It was the same old story. Nothing. But when I saw her coming out afterward her face told me that she might know plenty. Horror and despair were cut deeply into it, and the look in those great, dark Cajun eyes was a look out of hell.

She went past me without a word.

I could be wrong, I thought. Maybe it was the mark that wom-

an left on her, with her dirty tales about Vince. Maybe the bank job was as much of a surprise to Clo as it was to the bank. But something made me go after her.

The street was shaded by big trees and when she moved from one black shadow to the next it looked as if she'd gone underground. I walked faster and caught up with her.

"What do you want, Mike?" she asked, not even turning her head.

"Mostly I want you to know I had no part in that lousy deal."

She pulled away from the hand I laid on her arm, but not before I felt the chill of her flesh. "That woman? No, Mike, I know you didn't."

Then suddenly she started running. I never knew a girl who could move so fast. She always could when she was a skinny little kid, high-stepping it through the marshes like a heron. Where was she heading now?

Dubois pulled up alongside me in his old jalopy and I got in. "You want us to chase her?" Dubois asked me, every inch the trooper.

"You try that," I said, "and I'll kick your brains out. Run me home."

I felt in my bones that Vince Savoy was the one we wanted, but there wasn't a crack in the big

silence that wrapped up his whole organization. I kept thinking he'd come back and answer the Headquarters call for routine questioning, the way he had in that silver payroll job a long time ago. Having been a trooper himself, he knew all the right answers, and it sure would look better for him if he showed up of his own accord. But he didn't.

Meanwhile the public was getting pretty wrought up about the kid who'd died. They wanted some kind of police action, any kind, but fast.

It felt like a storm building up. You can smell it and feel it and see it in the queer light over everything, but you never know how bad it's going to be until it hits, and then maybe it's too late. That's how things were the night I got the call from Roux City.

There was a strong wind brewing in the Gulf, driving inland in gusts that churned up the sluggish water of the bayou, but it didn't budge the heavy heat that hung over everything like steam.

Felice had a lot of nice cold stuff ready for the table, nothing hot except the coffee. We were in the middle of supper when the phone rang. "I'll get it—" Felice said. But after she did her voice turned cold as the food on the plates. "It's Clo, Mike."

It was Clo all right, her voice thick and queerly choked. "Mike, I'm back in the house in Roux City."

"That's nice," I said sarcastically. "That's dandy. Am I the first to know?"

"No—no—it's not what you think—" She was close to crying. "I only came back to get some of my things. There's nobody here but me. I've got to see you, Mike—now, tonight! Please, please . . ."

"Okay," I said. "I'll be there." I hung up and turned to find Felice standing close by, her eyes dark with hurt and something that looked like fear.

"You're not going?" she whispered. "What right does she have to call you like that? Don't go, Mike."

"It's my job," I said flatly. "You know that."

"Clo? Clo's part of your job?"

"You know she is! You married a trooper," I reminded her.

Felice called something after me, but I didn't hear what it was as I took the front steps three at a time on my way to Headquarters to connect with a motorcycle, and less than an hour later I rolled into Roux City on the tail end of a rain squall that flooded the streets.

I found the address of the Savoy house in my notebook. I'd put a red ring around it the day I got

my assignment and now the ink ran under the rain, leaving a red smear on the page and on my fingers.

The house stood out from the junk heaps around it like a dime-store diamond in a can of bait. Too flashy for my taste, but it wasn't my house. I ran the bike around to the side and parked it behind some bushes. Then I went to the front door and rang the bell.

That's when I got my first jolt. My hand went back to where my gun ought to be, and wasn't. It flashed over me that that's what Felice had called after me when I left. I'd forgotten it again. I'm one fine trooper.

The door opened and Clo stood there. "You got here fast, Mike."

"That's what you wanted," I said, looking around. It was quite a place. Better furniture than I ever saw outside of a catalogue; lamps and bright colored rugs and drapes that hung all the way down to the floor. I whistled. "Say, this is something."

She nodded. "Vince likes to live good. I used to, too, when I thought it was on the up and up."

"Come off it," I said. "Don't tell me you thought he struck oil?"

I was looking her over now, thinking she was like one of those movie queens that look as if they

don't care if they get caught in the rain. She had on a little short black dress with no sleeves to it, and no makeup. Her hair was slicked back, showing every line and bone of her face, dead white, the eyes half shut and the mouth narrowed down to a thin line. She didn't seem like the girl on the campboat with dark hair blowing in the wind. This was somebody strange. She looked as if she'd just been pulled out of the river.

"You need a drink," she said, quietly. "It's still bourbon, isn't it?"

"Thanks." I took the drink she held out to me. "Why did you want to see me?"

She curled up on the big sofa, her long legs drawn up under her. "Sit down, Mike—no, here beside me—that's better—" And then, "This is your big break, Mike. I'm telling all I know."

"You're lyin'," I said. "This is some kind of runaround."

She shook her head slowly. "No. You still haven't got anything on him, I know that. But you will have when I tell you what I know."

I stared at her. No shame, nothing but a kind of frozen pain.

"Why the switch?" I asked her finally. "When they had you down at Headquarters, you wouldn't talk. I don't get it."

She had her hands twisted together in her lap, tight enough to hurt, and her eyes kind of veered off mine for a second. "That child—that little boy in the bank—Vince shouldn't have let that happen."

So that was it. Or was it?

"Who says he did?" I said carefully.

"He planned that bank job," she told me. "He worked on it for months. I thought it was just another of his crazy schemes. Vince always has to have something cooking . . ." She stopped.

There was that look again, the one I'd seen on her when she came out of Headquarters. That look of the damned.

"You're sure that's what's eatin' you?" I asked her. It wasn't nice, but I had to know. "You're sure it's the bank job that's botherin' you and not that other doll he's been carryin' on with?"

"I—I don't know what you mean." It was hardly a whisper, hardly a sound at all.

"I think you do. You told me that night on the campboat that you'd cut his heart out if he two-timed you. That's what you're doin'. And you know what he'll do to you if you rat on him."

"Why shouldn't I?" she cried out. "He's killed everything I ever felt for him. *Why shouldn't I?*"

"Take it easy," I said, putting my big paw over her locked fingers, trying to warm the ice out of them. "You don't have to be the one to sell him out. Some day we'll catch him dropping slugs in a pay phone and that'll be it. We can't miss."

"You can—you can!" she almost screamed at me. "While you're playing cops and robbers, he'll do something worse!"

"Okay, okay, take it easy."

She sat quiet for a long minute, that look frozen on her face, while a dull ugly anger rose up in me and I choked on it. I thought, it's still Vince, Vince, Vince—!

When she started talking again I was slow to tune in.

"—I guess you're right, Mike. I can't do it, after all. I thought I could when I phoned you, but now it's all died out inside me. I'm glad you came, though. I did want to see you again, just one more time."

She leaned back against the cushions, looking at me with those big dark eyes, and the hard whiteness of her face seemed to soften a little. There was a kind of sweetness about her now. Maybe it was remembering old times, I don't know. But it took the breath out of me. When she held out both hands to me I thought for a flash that maybe I had it doped right,

that she felt the same about me as I had about her, for half of our lives.

Her hands were still cold and shaking when I took them, but not for long. She came into my arms with a sob, like a tired kid coming home, and the warmth and sweetness of her overwhelmed me. I couldn't have stopped myself if I'd tried, and nobody could have stopped me.

What happened between us in that fine flashy house of Savoy's that night was like the old dream come true. We didn't stay there in the living room long. I lifted her up and carried her into a big, dim bedroom next to it, and once, when she turned her face away from mine for a moment wondered if she was remembering him. But it was too late then.

It wasn't long before Clo fell asleep. She lay curled up on the big bed like a ten-year-old, with one hand under her cheek and her dark hair spread out on the pillow. I didn't remember any crying, but there were tears on her cheeks.

I pulled the silk spread partly over her before I went into the bathroom, leaving the door open a crack.

I heard Vince when he set his key in the front door and the slam of it after him. Queer as it seems, at a time like that, my first thought

was that he'd played it smart—he'd come back for questioning.

He came straight through to the bedroom, shoving his keys back into his pocket. Then he saw Clo and stopped short.

It was plain that the last thing on earth he expected was seeing her there. At first he looked surprised and glad, but then his face turned dark. It's hard to put it, but the place wasn't neat—the way it would have been if she'd been alone. He knew.

Vince's right hand slid back to his gun just as I swung open the bathroom door and came out. He rocked back a step and swung the gun around to cover me. "So it's you! Stay where you are, Mike!" He nodded towards the bed. "Who was with her?"

"Me," I said.

I was watching him close and I saw what was in his mind. I dived into him. There was that one lunge and a jab or two before we locked; but it wasn't me he wanted. He was holding his gun arm free, but not for me. The gun exploded and we both stood there staring at what he'd done. She never even woke up.

The room started swinging around me and there was a thick, roaring noise inside my head. When I could speak, I said, "Okay, Vince. It's my turn. Get it over."

He laughed. If you could call it a laugh. It was more like the snarl of a dog that's been kicked in the belly. He was kind of bent over, looking up at me out of the tops of his eyes, and I saw then that he was gone—all gone. The craziness that used to come and go in those queer light eyes of his had moved in to stay.

"There's no hurry about you, Mike. I'd as soon see you sweat awhile."

He went over to the bed and pulled up the spread to cover the horror and ruin of Clo's face. As he did, I dived again. This time the gun fell to the floor at my feet. When I picked it up, all the fight went out of him. It must have been some kind of reflex. He shook his head a couple of times, as if it needed that to clear it.

"Man, oh man," Vince said, "I wouldn't want to be in your shoes. No, sirree. You've got to go on living—maybe for a long, long time."

I motioned him into the front room and called Headquarters.

When I put down the phone Vince asked me for a smoke. I shook a couple loose in the pack and he broke out a fancy lighter, gold. We sat there smoking until we heard the screech of the sirens.

Later, when they had him booked, I asked him if he wanted



anything and he said, "Hell, no. Not any more."

"You could put up an argument," I said. "The unwritten law, all that stuff. I wouldn't contest it."

He even smiled a little. "Thanks just as much, Mike. Say hello to Felice." He turned his back to me. But when I was leaving he swung around on his heels and stopped me. "Don't get the notion Clo was in love with you," he snarled. "There was another dame and Clo found out about her. It was a spite job! You hear me? A spite job!"

"Sure," I said. If it made him feel any better to think that, okay. Me, I wasn't so sure.

At the trial Vince clammed up completely. He wouldn't tell them anything they wanted to know about his organization, but it will come out sooner or later. Without him it will fall apart, and a few prominent citizens are going to start doing time along with the hoods. It's just a question of when.

He wouldn't defend himself against the murder charge either.

He said he killed her, that's all. He wouldn't say why. Vince wasn't the kind of man to tell the world his wife had cheated on him. He left that job to me.

It was in my official report, all of it. What else could I do from inside a uniform? I'm a policeman.

They grilled me for three days in the back room at Headquarters, hoping against hope that there was some terrible mistake. But when all was said and done, I was the fair-haired trooper who'd picked up Vince Savoy on a charge that would stick. They settled on some kind of disciplinary action "to be determined later."

What worried me sick was Felice. She'd stuck by me through it all, tight-lipped and dry-eyed. But she never said a word. Felice isn't much of a talker.

The old dream died with Clo, the "crazy dream that never had an earthly chance of coming true." It's my job now to make up to Felice for the hurt I've given her, to prove I love her in the ways that count.



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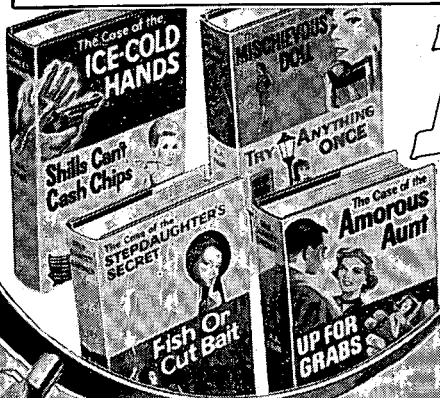
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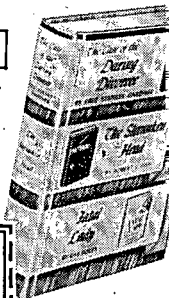
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